THE MARRIAGES OF MAYFAIR

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VOL. I. OF "THE DRURY LANE" NOVELS.

The Sins of Society

A NOVEL ADAPTED FROM THE DRURY LANE DRAMA OF CECIL RALEIGH AND HENRY HAMILTON

By CECIL RALEIGH

Mr. Cecil Raleigh, who has already won a large public as a writer of fiction, has undertaken the task of reproducing in the form of a novel the celebrated melodrama, "The Sins of Society," which was originally staged at the Great National Theatre and was the talk of the town from the highest to the lowest, and the public will have the interesting and unique experience of reading an actual description of characters and events exactly as they appear to the dramatist's mind.

Drury Lane Novels.

THE MARRIAGES OF MAYFAIR

A NOVEL

ADAPTED FROM THE

DRURY LANE DRAMA

OF

CECIL RALEIGH AND HENRY HAMILTON

By

E. KEBLE CHATTERTON

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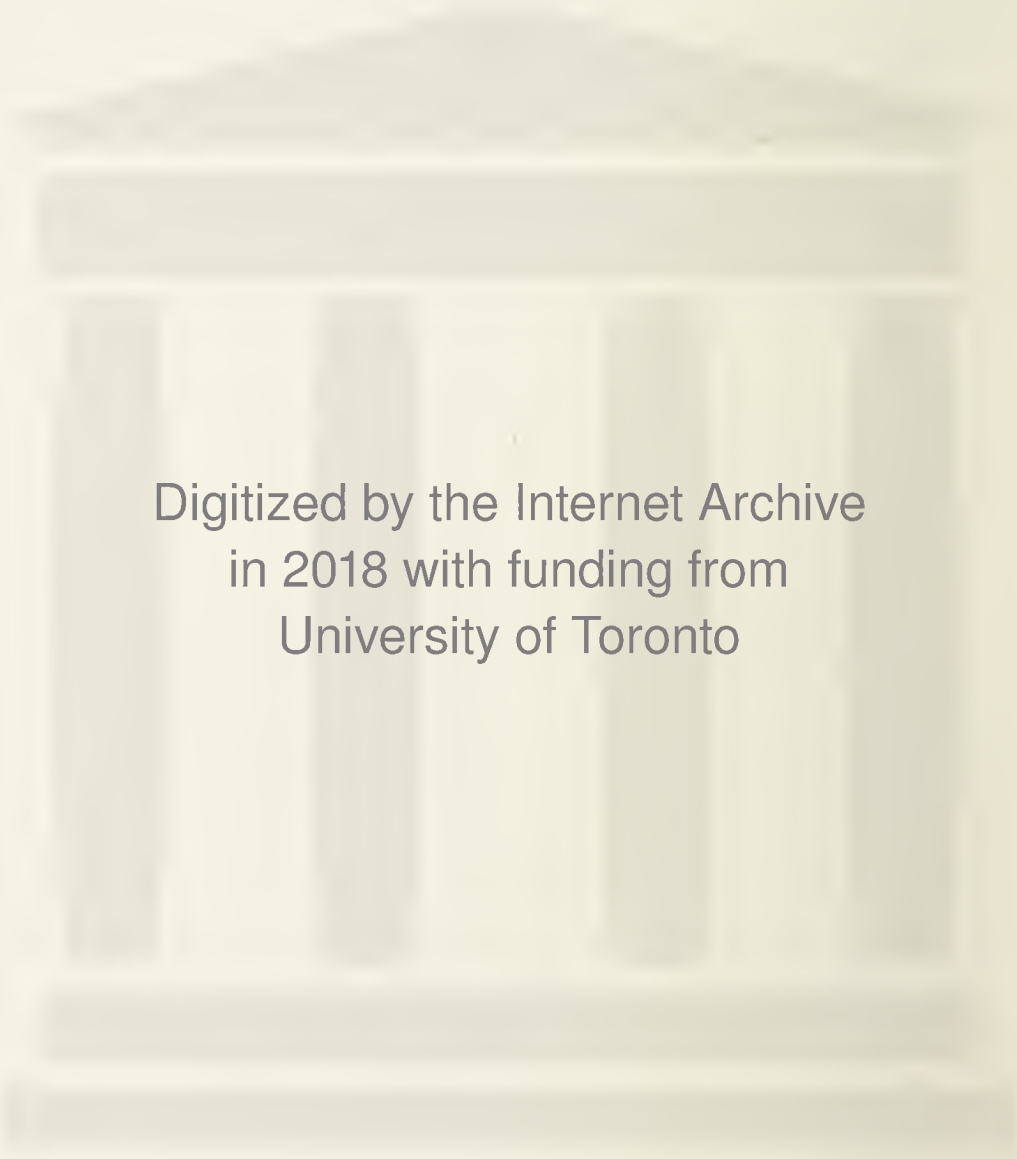

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TO MY SISTER

WITH MY LOVE

The Marriages of Mayfair

CHAPTER I

"PHEW—that's a near thing. . . . By Jove, I thought he was done for."

"Why—what? Anything happened?"

"Just look there. . . . Jolly plucky I call it: that youngster saved the old chap's life."

Rumpelmayer's was full of interesting people. Handsome men and smart women were flocking in from the Park and Academy. Summer was at its highest, the Season was at its gayest. Through Piccadilly the busy traffic was filtering down into St. James's Street, bright with its colour patches of geraniums and marguerites shooting forth from the window-boxes of the drab-hued clubs. The dark-blue sky above, flecked only by a few wisps of white cloud; the delicate toilettes of elegant women of fashion; the myriads of high lights dancing on the varnished wheels of barouche and brougham, and the warm red upholstery

of a passing motor car made up a brilliant kaleidoscope of London colour.

The red car had swerved rapidly round out of St. James's Street into King Street. As it did so the chauffeur blew his horn twice, but not before it was too late. There was a sudden shout and a sound of splintering wood as the full weight of the car crashed almost at right angles into a hansom cab.

Captain Carlyon, taking tea in Rumpelmayer's, had been the first to utter a remark. Putting down his cup, he had rushed to the window. In a moment several others were following his example, but already a policeman had stepped across to the rescue, and the usual crowd of curious Cockneys was encircling the melée.

"Why, surely—it's Nigel Villiers," suggested Sir Nicol Eardley, coming up to the window behind Carlyon, — "one of the Deerminster people you know," he added.

"What—Villiers of the Welsh Guards?"

"Yes," answered the other, "and here he comes bringing the old chap in."

A well set-up young man with dark glossy hair and a pair of eager blue eyes stumbled in through the revolving doors, half supporting, half dragging the dusty, dishevelled mass that he had but barely rescued.

"I hope you're not hurt, sir," Nigel inquired, as he deposited his burden on a chair.

A number of street urchins with a thirst for

sensation were glueing their eyes to the window outside.

"Oh, thanks—I don't think so," answered the other. He was evidently Nigel's senior by several decades. Of medium height, with hair just turning grey, somewhat gaunt of face and figure, he gave the impression of one who had lived a full life under a foreign sun.

Then passing his hand down his right side—

"Nothing broken, thank goodness—only a few bruises," he said.

Nigel was ordering an attendant to bring some brandy, when the policeman, notebook in hand, came in through the door. Touching his helmet, he approached the elder man.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began, "but could I have your names? I must get back to the cab—it's all smashed to smithereens."

"I haven't my card case with me," came the answer as he fumbled in his pocket with his left hand. The policeman noticed that it was stained with dust and blood.

"Then would you mind . . . ?"

"Certainly—my name's Merrowdale—Julian Merrowdale, Travellers' Club."

"Couldn't say 'ow it 'appened, sir?"

"No idea. It was all done in a moment. I think the horse took fright—it was really no one's fault."

"Well, sir, the cabman says it was the chauffeur. . . ."

"And the chauffeur says it was the cabman," interposed Nigel, impatient at the publicity with which he was being surrounded. "Just let 'em fight it out between 'em, and don't drag us into it." Then drawing out a small silver case—

"There's my card, and now let the matter end."

"Very good, sir, but if I *should* have to call on you. . . ."

"I shall be out," came the prompt answer. "You heard what this gentleman said—it was an accident. You go and settle it."

"Do my best, sir—can't do any more," was the final remark of the policeman, as a half sovereign found its way into his palm.

The attendant had returned with some brandy.

"Drink it right off," commanded Nigel, "it'll make you feel all the better."

"You're exceedingly kind . . . I can never forget that I really owe my life to you . . ." stammered Merrowdale, as a wave of emotion nearly overwhelmed him.

"Oh nonsense, sir," came the reply a little awkwardly, "I'm delighted to have been of some service."

"Service indeed—yes," muttered the elder man, placing the glass on the marble table. "This new London dazes me with its rush and roar. It's so different from what I remember of it twenty years ago—I hardly recognise it."

"You don't often come to town, then?"

"No; rarely even to England. I live mostly abroad. Only now and then I pay a flying visit —just to keep myself in touch with the world of modern Art. . . ."

"Art interests you?"

"I try to make it. I was an artist once myself. But there," he added with a wave of his arm, "we won't talk of that." Then rising slowly to his feet, "I'm well enough to go on now, so let me thank you once again," he said. "By the way, what name is it that I shall *always* remember so gratefully?" he inquired, gripping tight the younger man's hand.

Nigel drew himself up and smiled.

"My name's Nigel Villiers."

"Villiers?"

"Guards' Club will always find me. And when you find yourself in England again. . . ."

"Thanks very much. You a Deerminster Villiers, by the way?" he quickly asked as he gathered up his hat and stick.

"Yes."

"I—I wonder if I knew your father?"

"Alaric Villiers."

"Alaric. Yes. How very strange," he muttered half to himself as he shook off some dust from his coat.

"You knew him?"

"Oh yes—well. And your mother, too. She was Lady Margaret Constable then, a great beauty of a great season. And you're his son

and hers," he mused, walking slowly to the door with his eyes to the ground. Then, as if suddenly arresting his train of thought, he held out his hand again. "It's a very small world after all," he remarked. "Good-bye, and my very warm heartfelt thanks once more. I shall hope to meet you again, Mr. Villiers," he added, lingering at the doorway. "I'm a lonely man, with no son or daughter of my own, and my wife is long dead."

Nigel followed Merrowdale with his eyes across the road until hailing a passing taxi-cab the latter disappeared from view.

He turned back into the tea-room. At the same moment two people had come in from St. James's Street by the other entrance.

A tall girl with a wealth of glistening dark gold hair swept majestically down the room, attracting the admiration of every man and woman as she passed by the tables. Without the smallest trace of self-consciousness, but with the dignified air of a well-bred woman, she came in triumphantly, becoming immediately in spite of herself the centre of attraction and the cause of an excited buzz of conversation. Behind her followed her father. Of grave and stately mien, with iron-grey hair and a noble chin and nose, his profession as a soldier was not belied in his erect carriage. Immaculately dressed by the smartest West End tailor, the delicious sheen on his hat and varnished boots gave in his case an effect that was anything but foppish.

Approaching the window the girl halted by a table. Her father assented, and sat down.

"Some tea, please," she ordered, in a voice that was distinguished by its musical sweetness.

Villiers knew that voice in a moment, though he was the only person who had not yet noticed her arrival.

"Dorothy! What luck!"

"Oh, Nigel! How nice to meet you here!"

Then a deeper-toned—almost stern—voice—

"Ah, Nigel, my boy. How d'y do?"

He turned round towards the old soldier with a smile playing on his lips.

"Rippin', sir, thanks," he said, addressing his superior officer, "hope you are. So you've wandered west and left the Tower to look after itself?"

Lieut.-General Sir Anthony Gore, K.C.B., laughed.

"But where've you been to-day?"

"Sandown, sir; just got back."

"Ah—I hope you had a good day." Then resuming his look of determination, "Did you see anything of my precious son there?" he asked.

Nigel hesitated.

"Well—er—yes. I believe I did see him."

"Wasting his time and my money, as usual?"

The girl wrinkled her brow.

"Why are you so hard on Dudley, Dad?" she asked. "He's no worse than other young men; they all bet and go to race meetings nowadays."

"Honest young men," answered the General cynically, as he leaned forward and brought his fist down on the table, "*honest* young men don't bet when they have no money to bet with. To risk what you haven't got is to rob the man you bet with if you win," he explained with emphatic exactness.

Miss Gore cast her eyes down on to her plate. It was not the first time she had had to fight her brother's battles for him, though the result was ever the same.

Nigel took up the argument.

"Then I'm afraid, General, if your interpretation is the right one there are a lot of robbers about." He was speaking in jest but Sir Anthony was in earnest.

"There are, indeed, and a good many who begin as amateurs and end as professionals," the General went on. Dorothy looked up from her plate as if to plead a new point in her brother's favour. "Oh, don't try and make excuses for him," interrupted her father testily, "I'm tired of hearing them . . . Dudley is a born idler, an utter wastrel."

"I think he's only sowing his wild oats, sir," suggested Nigel, assiduously building a rampart with a few flaky crumbs.

Sir Anthony was about to express his feelings, but checked himself. "Why didn't I have a son like you?" he murmured quietly.

Nigel would have had some embarrassment

had he tried to reply. But just then the revolving door sped round and the Duke of Exmoor, a dapper little man with a jerky step, came towards them.

"Ah, how de do, Miss Gore—how d'y do, General?" Then turning to Nigel, "Seen you before, to-day, young fellow," he remarked cheerfully as he joined the party.

"Yes. I was afraid, Duke, you'd rather have seen me further."

"Not a bit—not a bit. What's a Steward for? Besides," he added, sitting down and adjusting his monocle, "you were absolutely in the right. That chap Jim Callender is a rank wrong 'un."

"Yes—I think so. Any way he's owed me a 'pony' for ages, and when I saw him in Tattersall's ring betting 'fifties' I thought it was about time to protest."

"Certainly. And in consequence we kicked him out. I think that'll spoil Master Callender's game for a little bit—eh?" he chuckled, turning towards Sir Anthony.

"Spoil whose game? I fear I didn't quite follow," he explained: for his thoughts had reverted to the subject of his son.

"Why—Jim Callender."

"Don't know him," protested the General. "Who is he?"

"A wrong 'un of the worst possible type. Half bookmaker, half moneylender's tout, I don't hesitate to say he would stop at nothing from

blackmail to murder. And yet," he insisted, "decent people who ought to know better shake him by the hand and call him a good sportsman. The turf tolerates anyone nowadays who happens to be a bit of a character—ah yes, more's the pity. It's my firm opinion, General," he added, shaking his finger in the air, "that racing is going to the dogs, and it's the fault of the gentlemen as well as the thieves."

The General nodded agreement.

"People in our own society," he continued, warming up to his theme, "seem to forget that 'noblesse oblige.' And 'pon my word, Nigel, we shall really have to speak very seriously to your uncle, Dolly."

"Why, surely . . ." (This from Sir Anthony becoming rapidly more interested.)

"What *can* one think of his bringing such a creature as Bess Bissett into the Members' Enclosure?"

Miss Gore pricked up her ears.

"That woman? Good gracious," she exclaimed. But the notoriety of Bess Bissett was as unknown to Sir Anthony Gore as had been that of Jim Callender.

"Surely you *must* know her," persisted the Duke of Exmoor, and proceeded to draw a character sketch of "the most vulgar little woman in London."

Nigel and Miss Gore took no further part in the conversation. Far more interesting to them

was the arrival of a tall, overdressed, over-powdered actress. Swinging into the room with a studied nonchalance and an affectation of ease, she trod the floor as if she were taking the stage. Never for a single moment forgetting the presence of the audience she was as anxious for their admiration, or at least attention, as they for their part were pleased to bestow the latter.

"That's Lily de Mario—one of the Smart girls from 'The Gadabout Girl' at the Hilarity," someone whispered to his neighbour.

"But the man with her?"

"Oh, that's her latest conquest—Percy Hossfield, the wealthy brewer."

A "horsey" young man with an anæmic complexion and an air of self-satisfaction at last secured a vacant table half-way up the crowded room. But not this nor anything short of jewels or flatteries could summon a smile to the down-turned lips of the spoilt, pampered Lily. What her origin had been no one seemed to know, and few were indiscreet enough to inquire. Some said she was half Italian, others that she had spent her youth across the Atlantic in South America. Her olive skin and flashing eyes, her tresses of coal-black hair were known to every reader of the illustrated papers. Nominally she was an actress, though she spoke her two lines on the stage with as little ability as she acted cleverly all the time she was outside the theatre's portals. So far her success in the theatrical

world had been—financially at least—meteoric. Managers were wise enough to recognise that her name on the playbills and her photograph in the papers drew "big business." Nor had it as yet been deemed necessary by her advisers that she should have the free advertisement of a theft of her jewels. The fact that she was known to dress never in the fashion but always just a little ahead of London, Paris and Vienna, combined with the fact that her shadow seemed for ever to be hanging over the Breach of Promise Court was quite enough to keep her name fresh and interesting to the general public.

Scarcely had her companion sat down than they were joined by a fair man with a small whisp of a moustache that only accentuated his weak mouth. But if his expression was disappointing, at least he carried himself well, and his manner bore the same contrast to that of the young brewer as the behaviour of Miss Gore had to that of Miss Lily de Mario. True there was not much in this man with the long thin nose and the delicate lips, but at least there was breeding.

She was casting her eyes lazily round the room with an undisguised air of boredom and bad temper.

"Lily," he exclaimed, coming up behind her chair. She had not noticed his arrival yet.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, scarcely turning her head.

"Hallo, old chap: just got back from Sandown?"—this from Percy Hossfield.

"Yes," answered the other, white with rage, "and I'll get back on you before I've done." Then turning again towards the woman, "You promised to drive back from Sandown with *me*," he said indignantly.

"Did I?" she asked with amazing innocence. "Well—I changed my mind."

Hossfield tactlessly interposed with a flippant remark, which was met by an oath from Dudley. Then suddenly regaining command of himself,

"I beg your pardon," he said, bowing to the actress.

The latter was clearly annoyed. "Look here, Dudley, she said, "if you're going to make a scene—"

"I'm clearing off till it's all over," said Percy spotting a friend just going out into St. James's Street. And with that he moved away. Dudley took his chair and sat down.

"You promised you'd drive back with me," he repeated placing his hat down and removing his gloves.

"And you promised *me* a bracelet. You know the one I mean—and I didn't get it—see?" she exulted.

The young man remained silent for a moment.

"I hadn't got the money," he answered more quietly. "You know, Lily, I'd give you anything in the world. You know"—extending his long

fingers towards her across the table, "I worship the very ground you walk on."

"Oh, la, la, la," she exclaimed with an empty laugh, "Percy told me the same thing yesterday. But I don't have to ask *him* twice for anything, oh no." She saw that her dart had struck a bull's eye, so she followed it up with another. "I like pals with money," she added with cruel bitterness.

The remark had again succeeded.

"You've had every shilling of mine," he complained sadly.

"Oh, get some more," she answered curtly, tapping her bejewelled fingers impatiently on the table.

"But how?"

"Go and ask your friend Jim Callender. You'll find him at Bess Bissett's—I know he's going there."

Just for a second Dudley hesitated, and in that one second his whole future hung in the balance.

"Very well," he consented, "but you'll sup with me to-night, won't you?"

"*If* I get the bracelet," came the unflinching reply. "You know, dear, I'm not a bit mercenary: in fact I'm not fond of diamonds really, but I can't stand the shine being taken out of me by a girl like Tottie Sylvestre who hasn't a line to speak and can't even make up decently. A girl in my position *has* to keep up an appearance, and—well, you know, dear, I have

my expenses. Even though Madame Mathilde never charges me for my dresses, yet you can't look smart without a few pretty things besides. I've set my mind on that bracelet, and if you can't afford," she hinted half cynically, half in mock sympathy, "Percy would give it me like a shot. But, of course, I haven't asked him—for your sake."

Dudley Gore faltered: then as he caught sight of the brewer wending his way back, he pushed aside his chair and walked quickly out.

"Finished?" asked the unhealthy Hossfield sarcastically, as Gore brushed past.

"Go to the devil," was the only answer as he continued on his way.

"I say," whispered Nigel excitedly to Miss Gore, "look who goes there."

The girl turned in the direction indicated.

"Why, it's my brother," she exclaimed in surprise, for he had been sitting with his back towards them, "thank goodness Dad didn't see him."

The young man hurried out on to the pavement and stepped smartly up St. James's Street.

CHAPTER II

"I CAN'T think," said Miss Gore scarcely concealing her annoyance, "I can't think why Dudley chooses such impossible people for his companions. Sometimes, Nigel, I lie awake at night, wondering—fearing that in the end he will do something dreadful and disgrace us all. Oh it's terribly hard to see the pater worrying over him day after day. Dudley knows better—knows how jolly sick we all feel about him, but nothing seems to matter. I've done my best to shield him—I've even told lies for his sake, but there," she added shrugging her shoulders, "you can't convince a fool of his folly. No wonder just now father wished that you . . . ."

She did not complete the sentence. A break came in her voice and a flush to her cheeks. Nigel noticed both—and understood. Somehow his hand slid under the table into hers and pressed it tenderly and with feeling. Then looking deep down into her eyes,

"If I asked your father, would he . . . . would you—oh Dorry, you'll give me a chance, won't you?" he asked pleadingly.

Her long dark eyelashes drooped down as she avoided his piercing gaze.

"I know we shall be happy, Dorry—just you and I, though I've got dooced little to do it with," he continued with a sigh, "but bread and cheese and kisses, you know . . . ."

She looked up and smiled playfully. Something soft and small gave his hand a gentle squeeze that was more eloquent than words.

Nigel saw victory within sight: he pursued his plan, martialled his forces and rushed the citadel. Dorry had consented, what else mattered now? Then as if it had dawned suddenly on her,

"The question now is what'll Dad say," she remarked somewhat nervously.

Sir Anthony had moved across the room with the Duke to speak to some friends.

"Oh, he'll want to talk money—of course. It's a way fathers have. I have my pay you know, and my people allow me . . . but good gracious," he exclaimed, looking up suddenly.

"What is it?"

"My uncle Dolly," he answered, as he watched a middle-aged, middle-sized, portly figure moved towards them. Gouty and grotesque, good-hearted and gallant, Lord Adolphus Villiers was a familiar figure in the Bohemian sections of society. Uncharitable people said that he was irresponsible, others that it was a pity he allowed himself to be sponged on by inferiors:

but by general consent he was voted at least eccentric.

When the first shock of surprise had passed, Nigel became conscious of a partially subdued titter running through the room.

"I call it perfectly outrageous to bring in a woman like that. Did you ever see such a hat! . . . Who do you say? Bess Bissett? The music hall person? . . . What *are* we coming to, indeed?" . . . "Oh no—it's the man's fault—I blame him entirely! Thank Heaven, society can't sink very much lower: three years is the limit I give to these alliances of stage and peerage and then comes the divorce with the usual unsavoury details and the portraits of the parties in all the papers. It's a disgraceful business altogether"—this latter remark from Captain Carlyon, carrying assent from the other members of his party.

"I've come 'ere to see the Smart Set, and I'll see it." Nigel could hear the breezy Bess Bissett protesting as her companion in vain tried to curb her ostentatious manners. She was a full-length picture of vulgarity, from her plebeian brow and the tip of her little nose to the arch of her funny little feet. Without a suspicion of vice in the whole of her being she was filled with one large desire to take all the pleasures that a civilised city affords without at the same time forfeiting any of the respect which in her stratum of society was not denied to her. "Ullo," she almost

shouted in natural exuberance, "why there's Lil de Mario. Toodle—oo, old dear," she exclaimed waving her hand across the room.

"For goodness sake, don't do that," corrected Lord Adolphus, at once irritated and ashamed.

"What's the matter with it?" she asked wrinkling her forehead.

"Matter? Why everything," he answered sharply. Then throwing one leg over the other, he half turned away from her, and muttered to himself, "Gore, Villiers—Tenby—Exmoor" as he looked round the room counting his friends and acquaintances, "Good lor," Lady Mab and Carlyon as well.

Bess Bissett was watching him.

"What are you doing," she asked.

"Oh, nothing," he replied, twisting round in his chair again, "only I er—fact is I know a lot of people here."

"Lucky we came then," was the instant response.

"Very—only be careful, little girl."

His lethargic brain was beginning to wake up. Why ever was he such an ass to bring her where he would be bound to meet everyone he ever knew?

"Careful o' wot?" she asked straight at him. "Ain't ashamed of me are you?" she taunted, getting on her dignity.

"Oh—certainly not," consented Lord "Dolly," looking wildly for cover.

"Very well, then," she said with some determination. Then suddenly lighting up, "I knocked 'em at Sandown, didn't I? Wasn't another 'at like mine there" was there, she inquired, more than a little pleased with herself.

"No, there wasn't, to be sure," he answered decisively.

Lord Adolphus turned his eyes to the other side of the room. As he did so he caught sight of the Duke of Exmoor returning to his table and bowed.

"'Oos your fat friend"

"Exmoor," he answered curtly, feeling that the limits of endurance had already been passed.

"Come off it—Exmoor's where the convicts come from."

"That's Dartmoor: I said Exmoor—the Duke of Exmoor." His indignation was getting beyond control.

"You might introduce me," she continued without a break.

"Thanks—but . . ."

"Oh well, of course, if you don't think me good enough."

"I made no such suggestion."

"Very well, then, introduce me."

He hesitated an instant. Then—

"I can't," he said with some embarrassment.

"You mean you won't, she insisted as she poured out tea.

"Oh, do use the tongs and not your fingers," he commanded, losing control over his feelings.

"Bother the tongs. You're ashamed, that's it —yes, you are. But it's me that ought really to be ashamed of going about with a dodderin old geeser—"

She shook her head in anger and the feathers swayed like palm trees in the breeze.

"Dodderin? I'm in the prime of life. If you've finished . . ."

"No, I haven't. Never you mind me, if you want to go. I'll stop here with Lil. Run along —*I* don't want you. I'm sorry I'm not good enough just because ma lets you lodgings—which you don't pay for. You might tell your fine friend Dartmoor, or however he's called, what I say," was her choice retort.

"Thanks," said the other slowly getting up. He was determined to seek a less public retreat elsewhere at all costs. "If you really *don't* mind . . ."

She was ready with a reply, but only the part of it reached him as he made for the door and fled out into the street, almost colliding with a lady coming in.

"Ah, mother dear," greeted Nigel, rising from his chair.

A handsome woman stepped in as if she had stepped out of a Romney. Of slightly more than medium height her appearance was distinguished, her manner discriminating.

Famous for her beauty as a girl she still exercised the same charm that late summer brings with it after even the most brilliant spring. Not once but many times had she sat as a girl to the artists of her day, for the exquisite modelling of her long neck and the attractiveness of her profile were irresistible. Three consecutive years had seen her portrait on the walls of the Academy: twice her graceful features had been carved in marble. It had been the remark of a cynic who had once suffered from the atmosphere of disdain that seemed to hang always around her that only two media could adequately suggest the temperature of her affections--marble and solid ice. But in proportion as she selected her acquaintances with an old-world exclusiveness, so much the more was she appreciated by those admitted to the inner circle of her friendship.

She took her place at the table between Sir Anthony and Nigel.

"Do tell me Nigel," she began, "was that your uncle I saw going out?"

"Hem—er—yes, mother, it was."

Just then she caught a smile on the lips of the Duke.

"May I ask—what *is* everyone laughing at?"

"I think if you cast your eyes into the direction of the lady in vivid green . . ." suggested his Grace.

Lady Margaret looked down the room.

"But which?" she asked, "D'you mean . . ."

"Precisely—in the hat."

"What an appalling person!" she exclaimed, putting up her lorgnettes.

"The girl he left behind him," added the Duke by way of explanation.

"Well, really,"

"It's only uncle Dolly, mother,"—this from Nigel.

"I'm tired of that excuse," answered Lady Margaret. "I've heard it all my life. Dolly the irresponsible. Dolly the impecunious. Dolly the ridiculous, who's merely laughed at when other people would be cut."

"But the lady's a celebrity, one of the lights of our national theatre, the darling of the gods, the unrivalled Bess Bissett," put in the Duke maliciously.

"So I see," said Lady Margaret, laying down her lorgnettes.

"You don't mean that you know her?"

"Her father," she began "was a gamekeeper, her mother was lady's maid at Deerminster when my husband was alive. She herself was a domestic servant," Lady Margaret explained with emphatic clearness. Then in a tone that indicated her reluctance to discuss the subject any further she added with bitter sarcasm, "Dolly's taste is indeed unrivalled."

She turned to Sir Anthony. Miss Gore was handing her tea.

A few paces away the waitress overheard a

conversation as she stood by Miss de Mario's table.

"My old 'un's sister-in-law, Lady Margaret," Bess was explaining to the eager Lily, pointing with her thumb, "reg'lar proud and 'aughty, *I* can tell you—oh, quite the lidy. I don't suppose she remembers me now, but when I was a kid she used to smack my 'ead and give me apples. Makes me think of the dear old place it does to see 'er," she added sentimentally.

Suddenly she clutched at the table and sat bolt upright, as the boys selling the evening papers were shouting outside.

"What's that they're crying?"

"Come, Bess, pull yourself together, old girl . . ."

"But listen . . . 'Deerminster' . . . 'shocking accident.' Don't you 'ear it?"

"Course I don't: you're talking nonsense I tell you."

"No, it ain't," she persisted. "Here, Percy, old dear, get us a paper quick. I want to see it —I want to see it now."

Hossfield shuffled out as he was bid, when Bess turned in her chair to look across towards the door. The Duke had already heard the shouting and was coming in with a copy of the "*Evening World*." She watched his face and read its meaning. She saw him put the paper down and could just hear all that he said.

"Lady Margaret," he began—there was no

smile playing on his lips now—"there's some news here that I think you ought to know—at once."

"News?" asked her ladyship in alarm.

"Yes: it's very sad—very sudden. There's been an accident."

"To whom?" she asked, alarmed.

"Deerminster."

"Deerminster?"

Lady Margaret could at least feel surprise.

"Let me read it to you," said his Grace as he folded the paper. "We regret to learn by cable that the young Marquis of Deerminster was killed while playing polo at Simla this morning."

A look of amazement swept over the faces of his hearers.

"Deerminster—dead? Oh, how shocking—how terrible. Such a nice boy, such a good boy—gone."

"Then Nigel is Deerminster—Nigel, let me congratulate . . ." this from Sir Anthony.

Lady Margaret extended her hand to her son.

"Nigel," she exclaimed as if scarcely realising . . . But someone was already at her elbow.

"Beg pardon, my lady"—it was Bess Bissett—"I hope you'll excuse the liberty . . ."

The elder woman was thunderstruck.

"What *does* this woman want?" she asked in utter astonishment.

"I—I only wanted to—to offer" stammered

the good-hearted Bess, "my 'umble sympathy and congratulations like . . ."

"To *me*?" demanded her ladyship glaring at the crest-fallen girl.

"Y-yes. My name's Bess Bissett. I—I used to be at Deerminster Chase once. P'raps, my lady, you don't remember," she added, pitifully hurt.

"Oh, indeed," came the reply from the hard woman, "I do remember—that I am not accustomed either to receive sympathy or congratulations at such a time from people in your position. I remember perfectly," she proceeded disdainfully, "that at Deerminster you were in the kitchen then—a place, woman, to my thinking, that you should never have left."

Then turning to the new Marquis,

"Nigel, take me to my carriage," she commanded.

She rose from her chair and swept out.

CHAPTER III

DUDLEY GORE had wasted no time.

Walking smartly up St. James's he turned off to the right along Jermyn St., and stopping suddenly outside a dismal building painted a depressing yellow pulled at the bell. Evidently neither the brass handle of the knocker nor even the windows had been cleaned since the smart shower had scattered the dust of the day before.

A foreigner in an ill-fitting suit and soiled linen opened the door. Was Mistaire Callender in? Ah! He would go to see. Just a leetle minute.

Presently the Swiss returned.

"You coom inside?" he said.

Dudley followed him up the stairs. There was a muggy atmosphere in the house as if sun and fresh air had been ostracised for days. The hall was dark in spite of the June sunshine outside, and the stairs creaked complainingly. Mrs. Bissett's apartment house was not run on extravagant principles. The faded wall-paper, already beginning to peel, and the scarcity of varnish on doors and wainscotting were proof enough. Sunshine spoilt the carpets, open windows meant more work; so even the tiny panes at the angle of the stairs had been carefully

covered up with the most inartistic imitation of stained glass that gummed paper and clumsy hands could piece together.

"Confound you, I don't want to come up here," Gore remarked angrily as the slovenly Swiss stopped outside the door of the front room on the first floor. "I want Mr. Callender's room."

"I know—but he is outside."

"You haven't been to see."

"Ach," answered the Swiss. "I make knowledge prematurely."

The front door suddenly closed with an impetus that made the house vibrate alarmingly.

"So," he added, "*ze* door. He always make the slap-bang when he has backed the wrong-uns. You ask him eef I am not right—what?" he smiled familiarly.

Callender stamped up the stairs and pushed open the door, as the Swiss prepared to descend.

"Where's Bess?" he growled, throwing his hat on the table.

"She'll be here directly," answered Gore as he followed into the room, "I left her at Rumpelmayer's only a few moments ago. Come to your own room: I want to speak to you."

"No: I want to see her at once," he argued, walking up and down the room. He was a big, heavy creature with black-brown eyes and massive eyelashes that almost met across his low forehead. His hands were as restless as his

disposition and there was an unpleasant look of sullen dissatisfaction that never seemed to leave his face.

"I'm in a corner," he said, at last coming to a stop with his back to the fire-place. "If Bess is in a good temper I can touch her for a 'pony.'"

Dudley had been following the man's movements with his eyes.

"You can have a lot more than that if you'll help me."

"It's no bet," sneered Callender thrusting his hands deep into his pockets and giving a kick to a chair that stood in his way.

Dudley sat down on the offending chair.

"I must have some money to-night—at all costs," remarked the latter.

"I tell you I'm broke," came the consoling reply.

"Yes: but you *can* get it for me," protested Gore, "you know you always have done."

"And more fool me. I can't get none for myself, now, just when I want it most. I tried Larry Norton to-day" he complained, "an he told me straight I'd fed him up too thick with your paper. There's three bills due . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. That'll be all right, I tell you," he remarked just a little annoyed at being reminded.

"Ah, but when?" he enquired, beginning again to pace the room.

"Oh—next month. I er—,I've arranged . . ."

"'Ere stow it."

"If he'll put the three together and let me have another five hundred," Gore began, "I'll renew on any terms he likes to name. You can have fifty for yourself: d'you hear—fifty?" he added, extending his hand persuasively.

Jim Callender laughed.

"Can I? Well, I can't—no, not fifty bloomin' shillings on *your* name."

For a moment there was silence in the room.

"I promise you," said Gore, catching the infection of restlessness and rising from his chair, "I promise you I won't ask you again—on my word of honour it's right."

Callender flopped into an arm-chair as Gore came up behind him.

"You *will* help me—you know you can if you like?" he said leaning over the back.

The brown-eyed man sat forward at the edge of the chair and sniffed at the carnation in his coat.

"It's no go—I can't do it," he remarked with a shake of the head.

"Well, I've got to have it somehow," said the younger man going across to the window.

"Suppose it's for Lily de Mario again," asked Callender quizzingly. Gore turned round.

"What's it matter what I want it for? I tell you I must have the money—to-night."

"Well, then, you'd best go to them that's got it," came the curt reply.

"But who is there?"

Callender thought a moment.

"There's your blessed pal, Mr. Villiers," he suggested, stretching himself and sprawling his legs.

"What! Nigel?"

"Yes."

"Umph. He's got no money," said Gore with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Ain't 'e though? Then you 'aven't seen the papers?"

"Why—what do you mean?"

Gore advanced to the table.

"'Ere—read that" he grunted, throwing *The Evening World* across to him. "There you are—Markis o' Deerminster. Sixty thousand a year an' a deer-park for the blighter that turned me off the course to-day. He's got the luck, he has, and what's more the money. Besides, ain't he goin' to marry your sister? Why don't you ask him—there's the party for you to speak to."

Dudley read the paragraph with amazement.

"Dudley? . . . Deerminster?" he exclaimed as the paper fluttered to the ground.

"You could get plenty with *his* name on a bill," put in Callender grasping a fine opportunity. An idea had already occurred to him whereby he could also profit considerably if a little ingenuity were taken in planning the scheme.

Dudley Gore looked at his tempter, then at the pattern of the tablecloth, then at the paper

on the floor. He whistled a fragment of a song —and meditated, then stroked his weak chin with the palm of his delicate soft hand.

"By Jove—with his . . ." But he went across to the window again. A pretty girl was passing—not unlike Lily de Mario. He wondered what Lily was doing now—where was Hossfield.

There was a terrible struggle going on within him—a fight between honour and dishonour—duty and pleasure. Then the voice of the tempter behind sounded in his ears again.

"I could do a lot with his name on a bill."

"But he wouldn't give it."

Callender was ready.

"No, but couldn't you borrow it?"

Dudley turned on him with a look of indignation.

"What the blazes do you mean?"

"Don't get 'aughty, you wouldn't be the first to try. Besides where's the 'arm, if you pay the money back: an' you say you're goin' to?" he asked seductively.

"And I am—of course." He paused to think. "But if—if somehow . . ."

"Anythink went wrong?" Callender put in as if to help him, "Well—he's rich and—he's going to marry your sister. Isn't that enough? He's dead mashed on 'er from what I hear."

"If ever she knew?"

"But who's going to tell her? Would he?" asked the plausible rogue. "Look 'ere," he con-

tinued, "supposing he did find you out, would *he* put you in the dock—her own brother that is? Go on, the job's safe enough."

"Safe?" asked the young man, while the meshes of the net were drawing tighter and tighter around him.

"Yes—safe as the Bank of England. But mind you—you needn't tell me nothin'; I'm only shewing you—if I 'ad a bill with Deerminster's name on, I could get it done to-night. And not for 'undreds but for thousands."

"There's no other way?" he asked foolishly.

"Not to-night, no. And afterwards only one other way—for you."

"One other way—what d'ye mean?"

"Look 'ere" said Callender, shirking his question, "'ow far are you going with Lily de Mario?"

"I'd go to . . . anywhere—to the end of the world, if she'd come with me—alone."

Callender lit a cigarette.

"You'd be darned sick of the job, I'm thinking."

"You don't understand," corrected the infatuated Dudley.

"Never mind that," answered the other with natural bluntness. "What I'm askin' you is this—would you do a bolt with the money and 'er, out of London, out of the country, right clean away: would you *live* abroad—in another name—never come back at all?"

"Yes," answered the other emphatically, "I would."

Callender puffed away at his cigarette.

"Wonder if she would," he remarked.

"I only know . . ."

"Percy 'Ossfield has got tons of brass, and you'd want a big lump to bluff 'im. But," he added, knocking the ash on to the carpet, "you *could* do it—that is if I 'ad my bit—you could do it a treat."

"Yes?" he asked eagerly. "Tell me—tell me."

"Oh, there's lots of time yet, my friend, lots an' 'eaps. An' perhaps you mightn't want it after all—you may meet the bill all right," he said, getting up.

"What bill?"

"The bill with Deerminster's name on it. Goin' to get it, ain't you?"—he went on impressing his query by tapping him patronisingly on the shoulder. There was a sign in the young man's face as if he was inclined to hesitate. Callender saw that sign.

"What, not for Lily—not to go one better than Percy 'Ossfield?"

Perhaps weak, back-boneless boy that he was, he might have demurred a little longer; perhaps notwithstanding the art with which the blackguard arranged his moves so as to play on the most sensitive emotions of the rash wastrel Dudley might have taken a minute to realise to what lengths his impetuous infatuation and

jealousy were driving him, had not at that unhappy moment the voice of the notorious Lily made itself heard from the hall below. It is remarkable to what extent our lives are influenced by the small and seemingly insignificant happenings of everyday occurrence. A chance word may break a friendship, a stray spark of kindness may set ablaze a heart that has for years lain cold and unresponsive. So in that one instant Dudley Gore fashioned his fate—inevitable, unalterable.

"Yes," he said, his voice quivering with emotion, "I'll have to get that bill."

The door of the little old-fashioned room was burst open.

"Ma, ma. Where's ma?" said an excited female, rushing across the floor. It was the unrivalled Bess Bissett, followed immediately by Lily de Mario.

"Dunno—downstairs" answered the calm Callender throwing the remains of his cigarette into the street.

"I 've been insulted," she went on excitedly, "insulted—me, Bess Bissett."

Callender threw back his coat, and digging his thumbs into the top of his waistcoat with his legs wide apart looked at her in mock admiration.

"Been insulted, 'ave yer? 'Ow's that—gave 'im 'is exact fare I suppose?"

"Cabman? No," she protested stamping her foot, "but by a lidy—a real live lidy that—well

—you just wait till I get my 'at off, that's all—and let 'er come 'ere now. D'ye 'ear me? Then I'll tell you—and tell 'er," she fumed, wrestling the while with a sheaf of hat pins that refused to be extracted from the recesses of an abnormal hat. This obstacle being at last overcome, she turned her attention to Gore.

"And as to you, you can get out as soon as you like. I never want to see you no more—nor any of your precious friends. I hate the sight of all of you—there," she continued, bringing her sunshade down on to the table with a crash that upset a vase of flowers and sent little rivers of water all over the tablecloth irrigating its red desert and finally pouring over a precipice on to the carpet below. Then turning on her heel she flashed out of the door with the same impetuosity with which she had entered.

"Tantrums—eh," was Jim Callender's comment.

"Yes, and she's quite right, too,"—this from the beautiful Lily.

"Is she?" said Callender, declining to shew any interest in the quarrels of females. "Well, I'll tell the old woman," he volunteered going over to the door, "and come back when it's all over." Then turning to Dudley as he halted by the door, "you know my room when you want me?" he added.

"Right ho," came the reply, but his thoughts were not of Callender.

CHAPTER IV

"LILY," cried Dudley as soon as the door was closed, "you'll have your bracelet to-night, darling."

"Dear old thing," she approved, almost smiling, "I thought I should."

She sat down on the arm of a chair and turned over the pages of a magazine.

"I'm paying a big price for it," he added a little hurt by her indifference.

"Percy Hossfield . . . " she began, swinging her foot and not raising her eyes from the paper. "Why," she suddenly exclaimed, "they've put in that wretched photo again I had taken years ago—it's too bad."

"I don't mean in money," he continued, endeavouring to rouse some enthusiasm or at least interest. "He wouldn't pay my price, but I'm paying his—because I love you."

"Oh, come off the sentimental," she begged, "for pity's sake."

Dudley bit his lip. Then going close up to her, "Lil," he said, "don't you care a bit for me?"

She laughed an empty, insincere protest.

"Of course I do," she answered, throwing aside the illustrated paper.

"Do you care enough to stick to me altogether?" he asked passionately.

She was a little taken aback by the directness of the question.

"You know, Dudley," she replied not unaffectedly, "that if you were not poor. . ."

"Then," he broke in fervently, "if I'd money. . .?"

"Oh, but what's the good?" she questioned, turning round to see herself in the glass over the mantelpiece.

"But if I *had*?" he entreated.

"I've told you"—pushing up a stray lock with the back of her hand.

"But not what I want," he murmured. "If I had plenty—if I were rich, would you. . ."

"How can you ever be? You told me once . . ."

"I ask you a plain question—do you care enough for me to leave all this—your life here, the stage, everything—and come away with me alone—for ever?"

"Oh, don't be absurd, Dudley," she protested.

"All right; I see," he remarked sadly, "that means you won't."

"You'll never ask me."

"I say I will—I *will*—and you answer?"

"Oh, very well—yes, yes, of course," she consented, at last turning from the glass.

He advanced towards her and taking her two well-manicured hands into his, "Whenever I ask," he said, "you'll come with me, won't you —you promise?"

"Yes," she said without a trace of emotion.

He drew her hands to his mouth and kissed them fervently—feverishly.

But the creaking of the stairs announced the advent of Mrs. Bissett who came slowly into the room. Her arrival was the signal for Dudley's immediate departure. Without further remark he closed the door behind him and ascended one storey higher to seek Callender.

Mrs. Bissett was the sworn foe of every member of the male sex irrespective of rank, status or calling. Of limited mental calibre she possessed a peculiar faculty for being singularly unattractive except towards the down-trodden members of her own sex, who never turned to her without finding sympathy in their troubles whether great or small. Born and bred in the village of Deerminster she had for the early years of her life been rigidly subjected to a narrow influence of the early Victorian period—an influence that manifested itself still in the dull melancholy of the house over which she presided with no uncomplaining tongue. The sad colour scheme of the rooms found its counterpart in her own personal adornment. Scotch plaids and a Paisley shawl were her particular choice, the whole surmounted by a cap in keeping with the

period of a by-gone reign, but which, nevertheless, had an unfortunate habit of becoming tilted at an amusing angle the moment her indignation was at its highest.

"Whatever's the matter?" she asked of Lily. "Has he been annoying my child?"

"No, it's me he's been worrying. Men are a nuisance," she observed with the air of martyrdom.

"And so say I," answered Mrs. Bissett seating herself in a rocking-chair with her hands folded in front of her. "Especially lodgers," she went on, not by any means displeased at a golden chance of going through a catalogue of her principal troubles and afflictions up-to-date. "Me a lone widow and a chronic martyr, I should be in the workhouse now if it wasn't for my poor Bess." Encouraged at finding she was speaking into sympathetic ears Mrs. Bissett drew out a bottle of spirit from the old-fashioned sideboard and setting two glasses on the table.

"Will you take a little?" she enquired of Lily. But the latter declined the proffered hospitality.

"There's Lord Adolphus," she continued, after settling herself comfortably and refreshing herself, "Lord Adolphus on the second floor, borrowing cab fares off the 'ousemaid and 'as paid me nothing for 'eaven knows 'ow long. Mr. Callender on the third floor, only paying

when he wins. And now there's Bess: but I won't have my Bess worried by no one, me bringing 'er up as a good mother should do."

"Oh, there you are," announced Bess coming in again with a bound.

"My child," exclaimed Mrs. Bissett nearly tumbling forward from her chair in surprise.

"Don't 'child' me," she answered in unabated wrath.

"Elizabeth, what *as* 'appened?"

"'appened—I've been insulted, that's all."

"Well, don't insult me," she exhorted with no little irritation.

"I ain't," contradicted the other. "'ow would you like to be told before a 'ole shopful of people —bloomin toffs—that—that—'ere where's that old sauerkraut? Carl, Carl," she called opening the door. "It's all 'Dolphus's doing—'e shall 'ear of what 'e left me to—I'll tell 'im. 'Ere, Carl, where are yer?" she shouted again,

The Swiss came running up the stairs and entered breathless.

"Where's Lord 'Dolphus?" she demanded. "Don't stare like that, you fool. Where's Lord 'Dolphus?" she insisted, bringing her heel down to the floor in temper.

The foreigner's face lit up of a sudden.

"Ah—he is dead," he answered gleefully.

"What?" screamed Mrs. Bissett, almost choking as she drained the contents of her glass. "Good 'eavens—where?"

"Upstair—second floor," continued the much abused Carl, gleaming with enthusiasm.

"And the body in my 'ouse?" observed Mrs. Bissett mournfully. "I tell you this *is* a life and no mistake," she reflected rising from her chair.

"Ah no—his body not dead—his hair is dead," explained the other as a flash of intelligence overpowered him.

"You fool—you mean *dyed*," she said collapsing into her chair again.

"'ere get out," demanded Bess pushing him on to the landing, "go and tell 'im to come down."

"But 'e say 'e see no one."

"Never mind. Tell 'im I want 'im—tell 'im to come down 'ere at once. Now pip 'off—hook it—sharp," she ordered, as the slovenly Swiss sped from the door and stumbled up the stairs to the second floor.

"I must be running away now, Bess," said Miss Lily de Mario, rising and adjusting her hat. "Percy's waiting in the motor and getting a bit ratty by now I expect."

"'Ang the motor—and Percy too," was Bess's polite comment.

"See you at the Tav' to-night, old girl?" she remarked, as she stood by the door.

"No; I shan't show."

"Go on. You'll be all right," she said optimistically, "after a good cry and a cup of tea. Well, so long, dear; afternoon, Mrs. Bissett."

Callender returned as the door opened for Lily to go out.

"What's upsettin' you, Bess, old dear?" he asked soothingly, seeing the girl's distress.

"You don't know Lidy Villiers—Lidy Margaret Villiers?" she explained between her sobs.

"*Our* Lady Villiers," put in Mrs. Bissett, for the sake of clearness.

"Don't I?" replied the bookmaker, sitting down on the other side of the table. "Oh, yes, I do—and 'er son too—Mr. Nigel Villiers. I know 'im and I shan't forget 'im neither."

"Nor me 'er," capped Bess. "You've seen the pipers?"

"Yes."

"Death of the young Markiss in India."

"Death?" interjected Mrs. Bissett, "oh dear, oh dear," she cried, picking up the paper.

"Which now makes this 'ere Nigel markiss. 'E was in the tea shop," Bess went on, "with 'is mother when the noos come. I 'eard it—I see 'em all talkin'. I didn't think there would be no 'arm," she explained apologetically, drying her eyes,—"me coming from the place too—so I goes up to 'er ladyship just to pass the remark, an' she turns on me like I don't know what. 'What do you want, woman,' she says. 'I'm Bess Bissett,' says I, 'peraps you mayn't remember me.' 'Oh, indeed,' she says, 'I do remember. You was in the kitchen at Deerminster'—right out loud for 'em all to 'ear'—'a place, woman, that you didn't

ought to have left.' And them was the very words she spoke—to me—Bess Bissett—as always has the 'eadlines of the bill on the Marmaduke Moses Tours. Now, ma, what do you think of that?" she concluded.

"All I can say is that I know she'd 'ave 'ad the answer back if she'd called me a woman. I know my duty, and I know my betters—what's more, I know more about them than they can tell me. It's not for her talk neither," she remarked with some determination.

"Ow's that, Mrs. Bissett?" put in Callender, sniffing a scent.

"My child's my own child and my 'usband's child," she continued in righteous indignation, "and I've got my marriage lines to shew."

"But ain't she got 'ers?"

"Oh yes, if they're worth anything?"

"She married a man with a wife alive—that's what's wrong with them," volunteered the man, as if to shew that he was in no sense behind the times in his information of any profitable scandal.

"Alive?" asked Bess, shocked and startled in spite of her everyday surroundings. "Why, that's bigamy," she reasoned.

"Or next door to it"—this from Mrs. Bissett. "Lord Alaric married a dancing girl, Sylvia Thorne, as all the town went mad over—an' 'ad to keep it secret while 'is mother lived. After a bit the girl ran off from 'im with an artist gentleman—a Mr. Julian Merrowdale. But the old

Marchioness was still alive and very strict. She'd have cut him off without so much as a shilling if there'd been a scandal; so he couldn't try for a divorce until his mother died. Then he'd no chance, for 'e was a great favourite with the ladies 'e was—and there was some that was jealous enough to give away anything—even themselves—when he fell in love with Lady Margaret."

She halted in her narrative for a moment, then readjusting her cap—

"But he got the best of them," she continued, "after a fashion. What did 'e do but go out on the quiet to Geneva, where the girl had been living, and got his divorce there—it's almost as easy they tell me as in America—and a year after Lady Margaret married him. That was good enough for Society to wink at and receive them everywhere. *But if that girl wasn't dead*" . . . she said dramatically.

"Then wasn't she?" inquired Callender.

"That's just what no one knows," she answered. "I remember there was a lot of talk about it in the family. I used to 'ear a deal when I did my lady's hair at night—it worried Lady Margaret something considerable, so they said. They tried everything, but the girl had left Geneva as soon as Lord Alaric come there, and was never found again." Then, as if to emphasise the distinction the more clearly between the family of the insulter and that of the insulted, "There was nothing of

that sort when *I* was married," she added, folding her arms and posing as the personification of propriety.

"Begad it'd be a rum go if she turned up again after all," suggested Callender, rising to his feet. "What if Sylvia Thorne wasn't dead? That'd put Mr. Nigel's nose out of joint for a bit—wouldn't it?" he asked with vivid recollection of the incident at Sandown. "Supposing she was alive—who'd be the heir, Mrs. Bissett?"

"Master Dolly, of course," she answered readily. She had a natural aptitude for matters of genealogical interest, especially when tinged with a suspicion of scandal.

"What—'Dolphus as markiss?" queried Bess,

"He's the only one left," answered her mother.

Bess bit her nails nervously.

"That'd get back on her—properly," she smiled vindictively.

"Aye, and on her son, too," thought Callender. Then looking up at Bess, "Why don't you do it?" he demanded.

"Do what?"

"Make Lord 'Dolphus fight it out to a finish—put up the money, go to the Courts, 'ave the law on them and clear the 'ole lot out, bag and baggage, as soon's ever 'e's declared Markiss of Deerminster."

"No, 'e wouldn't," said Bess thoughtfully.

"Wouldn't *you*?" he asked.

"Me?"

"Yes—if you was Marchioness."

Mrs. Bissett threw up her hands at the mere thought of such a possibility.

"Mr. Callender," she exclaimed, "whatever . . . ?"

"Ain't she good enough?" he questioned.

"He wouldn't do it," agreed the excited mother, hoping against hope. "He knows the story well enough, and he'll know what chance he has directly he hears the young lord's death."

"But p'r'aps 'e 'asn't. It's only just out," argued Callender. "You needn't tell 'im. Put the papers away so's 'e can't see them. 'E won't leave the house till his 'air's right—I know 'im. Look 'ere," he explained, "you've got twelve hours' start. Put the screw on tight, keep 'im up to the mark—he owes you money—yes, and 'e owes Bess more."

"More what?" asked Bess, somewhat perplexed.

Callender made a grimace.

"Why—always about with 'im. Can't wonder at people talkin', can you?" he asked meaningly.

"They don't dare to say a word against my Bess," said Mrs. Bissett defiantly.

Callender advanced to where the latter was sitting.

"Ah," he laughed, "scandal's wonderful plucky—be'ind your back, Mrs. Bissett. P'r'aps it's reached Lady Margaret's ears—p'r'aps that's why she took on so. . . ."

Bess's nature was ablaze.

"If that's it . . . " she began, but the words stuck in her throat with rage.

The clever schemer took up his position behind Mrs. Bissett's chair.

"What would 'er title be if she was Lady Deerminster? Who'd be 'woman' then?" he asked artfully. "Nice place the Chase to live in, Mrs. Bissett," he remarked, rocking her pleasantly to and fro in her chair, "as mother-in-law to a Markiss. Make the old lot sit up, I'm thinkin'—waitin' on you 'and an' foot. All the county callin', you know, and Lady Margaret's place filled all proper and correct by Bess—our Bess"—he emphasised, letting the chair go with a push—"Lady Bess—the Marchioness."

"It's really most inconvenient," protested a voice as the door opened. "Mind *no one* comes up." It was Lord Adolphus addressing the Swiss. Attired in a dressing-gown that had once been of rich brocade, but which now shewed the advance of time, his head swathed in a towel, with the marks of hair-dye showing through on his forehead, Lord Adolphus, the doddering, came into the room the picture of absurdity.

"What *is* the matter?" he enquired, looking anxiously around the room. "Has anything happened?" He looked at Bess, but she was kneeling by the side of her mother, shedding tears profusely—crocodile tears. He looked at Mrs. Bissett as if to glean some information, but

her eyes were centred entirely on her daughter, so he glanced across the room in the direction of Callender.

"It ain't for me to tell—ask them," he said with an assumption of pained emotion. "All *I* says is act the man, Lord Adolphus, even if you are a lord—act the man." He resumed his peripatetic rambles up and down the well-worn carpet.

"Act the what?" asked the other, surveying the scene. Nothing was quite clear to him, excepting that his landlady's daughter was bordering on those terrible hysterics that he had only previously witnessed but once. "Dear little girl," he comforted, advancing to where she was kneeling, "dear little girl. . . ."

But the sobs became more frequent, and her face was hid in her hands.

"What *is* the matter?" he begged a second time, utterly at a loss.

"You'll have to leave this house—at once," was Mrs. Bissett's explanation.

"Leave? Good heavens. I can't till my hair's dry," he made answer, unconsciously humorous. "Don't be absurd, Emily. Where can I go? I know I'm in your debt, but if I haven't paid for the moment. . . ."

"You 'aven't paid for nothing, Master Dolly," remarked Mrs. Bissett, "and you 'aven't paid for a year."

"Ah," demurred his lordship, "I didn't think it was as long as that."

"It's a good deal longer," came the reminder.

"If I've taken advantage . . ." he stammered.

"It's my girl's honour you've taken," she insisted warmly.

"*I* have?"

"Yes," broke in Bess, "and don't you put it on. You've took me here, you've took me there. . . ."

"Well, but you asked me."

"That's just like a man. Oh, blame me—coward."

"Pardon me: it took a great deal of courage—especially in that hat."

"What's my 'at to your reputation?"

"Well, at any rate it is my own, Anyway," he added, removing the towel from his head, "we'll never be seen together again. Much—much as I shall regret it, nothing will ever induce me to appear in public again in your society. I'm going back to my room—I shall dine there. Don't send me either papers or letters—especially the bills. I want to be quiet—to get calm. To-morrow, when I feel more myself, I will go out and give the lie to these scandal-mongers—whenever and wherever I find them."

"And what about me?" asked Bess, sitting up on her heels. "Am I to go out and 'ear these vixens say—first you took me on, then you chucked me over, till at last you got tired of me?"

"If either of us has made a mistake. . . ."

"But it isn't me that's made it," came the correction. "If I was doing wrong, you should 'ave told me so," she went on illogically, "you was old enough. You knew—an' you let me. Oh I'm no class, I daresay, and all that: but whatever I am and 'oever I am, I can earn my own living and pay my own way—owe nothing to nobody—and go straight and be straight. But now when people say I'm not, who is to blame—you or me?"

Lord Adolphus's kindly heart was moved.

"Bess," he said, "are you speaking quite seriously?"

"Don't it sound like it?" interrogated the mother zealous for her family honour.

"If I thought so," observed his lordship slowly, "there would be only one thing for me to say."

"Then say it," demanded Bess.

"Certainly. I have known your mother since I was—ahem, many years. I am very sensible—of her kindness—of her consideration. I am very grateful for her—yes, for her charity. . . ."

"Master Dolly," interrupted Mrs. Bissett.

". . . It was a very poor return to offer you such small courtesies as I was able: it was my good fortune if they were agreeable," he went on, becoming in his own way eloquent with an old-time courtliness. "But if they have been misunderstood—by anyone—at any time"—he broke off and walked across to the mantelpiece—"I'm too old to talk of love," he said, "but still, as a

gentleman, there is at least one reparation that I can make, and I make it here and now. Bess," he asked, going up to her and lifting her to her feet, " will you be my wife ? "

" To-morrow morning ? " she answered, without a shred of surprise, " by special license ? "

" When you choose."

She stood still looking at him for a few moments. Then at length something within prompted her to go to him.

" Yes, Dolly," she consented, thrusting her arm in his and laying her head on his shoulder, " I will. I'll stick to you—and fight for you—and try to be a good wife too."

Callender looked across to Mrs. Bissett and smiled with a glad satisfaction that vengeance would soon be his. He put on his hat and went out into the street.

CHAPTER V

The village of Deerminster lies three miles away from the nearest railway station of Woodham, and forms one of the prettiest and most old-fashioned corners of Berkshire. Nestling in a hollow formed by three hills which in the Spring are usually one yellow streak of fragrant primroses and heart-stung ferns, it depends for its existence so entirely on the Chase as to have no productive industry of its own apart from a few market gardens and an orchard or two.

As you leave the little thatched post-office to your right you come to the village green, opposite to which are the gates and lodge of the half-mile carriage drive, which, after making a bold sweep through a deep cutting flanked on either side by thick bushes, suddenly bursts on to the park with its vast acres of peaceful pasturage dotted here and there with herds of deer and a few head of Scotch cattle. Far as the eye can see Deerminster Park stretches to the right and left until a line of woods on the one side and a little range of purple hills on the other join up the estate to the sky.

Deerminster Chase—the home of the Villiers family—is a fine old Elizabethan mansion built on

raised ground above a little trout stream that meanders leisurely through the park. Its red-bricked turrets stand up picturesquely against the green pine trees that sway majestically in the background, while at its feet grow delightful old English flowers—hollyhocks and foxgloves, rich blue pansies, nasturtiums and borders of "London Pride." Leading out from the long terrace which commands a striking view across the park is the famous sunken Italian garden with a few weather-worn statues of classical figures, a small fountain at each corner of the square and a quaint old sun-dial in the centre. A delicious carpet of soft, yielding grass fills in the space; over which a vain peacock struts and screeches to his heart's content. Finally, in order to shut in this secluded square from the rest, its three remaining sides are lined with low bushes deftly clipped to resemble fantastic birds of the air.

Deerminster is a connecting link between the old feudalism and modern democracy. The village and the Chase have been always complete in themselves, nor do they allow outside influences to interfere with them to any appreciable extent. No servant within living memory has left the Chase except to marry, and even then the clique has been continued. Of the present generation a former butler had married the housekeeper's niece and settled down in the Deerminster Arms, a comfortable hostelry on the main road through the village. One of the maidservants had formed

an alliance with the head gamekeeper, and her son in turn was now chauffeur. And so the custom had gone on from generation to generation.

The previous marquis had stayed but infrequently at the Chase. As a child he had been delicate and his parents had taken him abroad for most of the winter and spring. Then, having attained his majority and his full health, he had been for the greater part in India with his regiment. Therefore, when the news of the fresh succession came, there was great excitement at Deerminster. The rumour of the engagement of their new marquis added a sentimental interest that set all the women folk of both village and Chase a chattering. Not for years had Deerminster possessed its chatelaine. But now, doubtless the former entertaining on a large scale, the house-parties, the hunt balls and shooting parties would all be renewed afresh.

For days they had all been working industriously erecting a triumphal arch in the village and making preparations for the homecoming of their master. The village choir, under the direction of the schoolmaster, Mr. Elkins, had practised assiduously in order that on the great day an "Ode of Welcome," specially written for the occasion by the aforesaid Mr. Elkins, might greet the new heir. So it came to pass that on this festive day the bells of the church on the hill rang merrily from soon after sunrise.

Old pensioners donned their best clothes quite early in the day. Suits and gowns that were never worn except on the occasions of weddings or funerals were taken out from cupboards and drawers and introduced once more to the light of day. Children were not allowed to go forth from the threshold of their homes until their healthy little faces positively shone with cleanliness. Jeremiah Lamb, bent and aged, toddled slowly down the street and across the green, the oldest inhabitant and the first to arrive at the Chase to join in the welcome that day. This was the fourth marquis that he could remember, and he doubted not that this would also be the last, as he informed the little knots of villagers gathered at their doors. And so he passed into the park supported on the one side by his big stick and on the other by his great-grand-daughter Prudence, looking the picture of sweet innocence in her cream frock and white ribbons.

The official programme included the meeting of the new marquis and his mother at the station by some of the villagers. Arrived at the gates of the park the horses were to be removed and their places taken by enthusiastic and loyal servants of the estate. Mr. Elkins' high-spirited boys had assembled soon after old Jeremiah Lamb, and had received their last admonitions respecting the time and manner of their singing. Mr. Elkins, himself, a mass of nerves and fussiness was running about everywhere, at once a

source of keen amusement to the unruly choir and of hindrance to the male servants of the house.

"Now, you boys." he shouted, for the third or fourth time, "you quite understand when you are to come in with the Ode of Welcome?"

"Yes, sir," answered a chorus of eager voices.

"Then mind you remember; and Watson, take your hands out of your pockets. First of all," he explained again, but this time without the undivided attention of those whom he was addressing, "there's the band with 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'—don't try and sing against that. Then the Rector will read the Address of Welcome, and don't break in on that whatever you do. Then Little Prue Lamb presents Lady Margaret with a posey of flowers. Finally—"

"There's Mrs. Clayson, the housekeeper, sir," first one boy and then another shouted as they watched the crowd assembling.

"Be *quiet*, boys," he ordered severely.

"And there's the butler, Mr. Dorman," exclaimed another, getting beyond control.

"What boy said that?" growled the schoolmaster.

"Please, sir, it wasn't me," answered the foremost group including the lying delinquent.

"Goodness gracious, Mr. Dorman," remarked Mrs. Clayson, flitting across the lawn in her black satin dress, "if there isn't the Duke of Exmoor."

"Bless my soul," replied the butler who was putting the finishing touches to the red carpet

covering the steps that led from the drive between two ornamental lions up to the door of the house. "Make way there," he urged, pushing his way in among the throng, "stand back some of you.'

"Good morning, Mrs. Clayson. Good morning, Dorman," greeted his Grace as he stepped smilingly out of his car. "Not late, am I?" he asked pleasantly. "Thought I must run over and assist."

"I'm sorry," apologised the tactful Dorman with a bow, "there's no one here properly to receive your Grace. It's a great honour. . . ."

"Tut-tut," answered the Duke. "Must be neighbourly in one's own county, you know. The Marquis and I were lads together: must come over and drink his health a day like this—eh, Dorman."

"Yes, your Grace," assented the other, "and plenty of the '92 Perrier Jouet still left to do it in," he added with a merry twinkle.

"And plenty also to drink it, I dare say," capped the Duke.

"Your Grace may well say," observed the butler, with a look in the direction of the scores that had by now collected. "And there's ale and cider in the park for anyone that likes to ask."

"And they all like—eh?"

"Every one of them, your Grace. I'm sure that if drinking his lordship's health would do him any good he'll live to be a hundred," opined the butler.

"Who's going to live to be a hundred?" asked a shaky voice. "I'm ninety-five come Michaelmas," croaked the bent old figure of a man with white hair.

"Why it's old Lamb, isn't it?" inquired his Grace.

The old pensioner had secured a favourable seat whence he would be able to observe everything. At the approach of the Duke he rose slowly and doffed his hat.

"No, don't get up—please stay where you are," said the Duke kindly. "Ninety-five are you, Lamb? My word, that's a great age."

"Ninety-five, your Grace," he went on feebly, insisting on rising to his feet, "and going to be a centurion."

Mr. Elkins, with his hands behind his back, had strolled across towards them. "*Centenarian*," he corrected, "I suppose you mean."

"I say I'll be a centurion—I know my own business, Mr. Elkins, and you mind yours," came the rebuff.

The Duke moved quietly away not a little amused.

"Ah, Hazel," he remarked cheerily, recognising the huntsman, "turned out in pink to do honour to Deerminster?"

"Yes, your Grace, and to give his Lordship a view halloa."

"Well, no one can do it better," he congratulated. Then seeing the schoolmaster striding

back to his charge he chaffed: "Brought your puppy pack with you, I see, Elkins? They're going to give tongue, too?" he asked.

"Your Grace," he replied with studied dignity, "they are to sing an Ode of Welcome to his Lordship."

"Ode of Welcome?" repeated his Grace, scarcely appreciating the intense earnestness of the schoolmaster.

"Written and set to music by myself," Elkins proceeded with considerable pride, "in honour of this auspicious occasion. The main burthen," he explained, clearing his throat as if to do himself full justice, "is borne by the boys: the tenors and basses coming in in their turn."

"Or out of it?" suggested the Duke wickedly.

"It commences," continued the worthy Elkins far from being discouraged, thus:

"All hail to Deerminster's new lord—All hail."

A volume of sound immediately arose from behind—the combined voices of boys, tenors and basses who, mistaking the signal, shrilled loudly across the lawn to the consternation of the assembled guests.

"Stop, stop," bawled the schoolmaster turning round to the choir in extreme annoyance. "I'm speaking to his Grace—you idiots." Then resuming his former conversation, "The Ode goes on like this:

"All hail.
Great in the senate, glorious by the sword,
May he prevail."

"But I say, you know," remarked the critical duke, "if the 'senate' means the House, he hasn't taken his seat yet; and as to his sword—well, he's never drawn it except on parade."

"Your Grace," answered the other far from displeased at his efforts receiving so much attention, "the Muse anticipates. I have concluded with these sentiments:

"Of welcome do not fail,
But give to every gale,
That lilts the land along,
The burden of our song—
'All hail.'"

"All hail. All hail," broke in the unruly choir once more.

"Wonderful," commented his lordship as soon as the infuriated schoolmaster had succeeded in quelling the mutiny, "quite like an English summer—all hail."

But now from the direction of the lodge gates the distant sound of cheering was wafted to their ears. Another moment and the dust was seen clouding up from the dry road as dozens of feet pulled the triumphant carriage or ran shouting by the side. Quickly it came across the park until crunching the gravel it halted in front of the red carpeted steps.

A wild volley of hurrahs was fired by the throng as the village band to the best of its ability, and with no little effort to preserve time and harmony, played the familiar chords of "See the Conquering Hero." Mrs. Clayson was

bustling about in a high state of nervousness, scattering enquiries for the Rector. Little Prue Lamb advanced hesitatingly to the carriage and offered a bouquet to Lady Margaret, who smilingly acknowledged the same by kissing the pretty little child on both cheeks. With uncovered head the Duke of Exmoor stepped forward to the edge of the red carpet, smilingly shook hands with Nigel and his mother, and escorted them to the daïs.

"Thank you so much, Exmoor," said Nigel, "for coming to welcome us."

"It's really most charming of you," added Lady Margaret, looking more than usually handsome in a black picture hat and a gown of delicate heliotrope.

The dusty, perspiring stablemen who had dragged the carriage over the half mile, speedily pulled it away as the stern tones of the schoolmaster was heard among the crowd. "Make way for the Rector. Kindly let Mr. Norman pass." Instantly the guests left a lane for the white-haired cleric to pass down to where the new Marquis and his mother were standing. Coming up to them he bowed twice and, producing a manuscript, commenced to read the address of welcome.

"My lord," he began, "on behalf of your tenantry and dependants, I have been asked to make myself their spokesman" . . . ("Hear, hear," shouted old Lamb) . . . . "and to read you this

their address of welcome, which I am greatly gratified to do." ("Hear, hear"—this from Hazel the Huntsman). Then raising his voice, "To the Most Noble Nigel," he continued, "John Alaric Delafosse, tenth Marquis of Deerminster . . . . "

But the rest of the address was lost in sound, for by an unfortunate contretemps the band, mistaking its signal, commenced to play "For he's a Jolly Good Fellow" with a zeal that not even Mr. Elkins' wrath could stop.

Scarcely concealing his mirth Nigel advanced to the Rector, and taking his hand firmly, "Thank you, Mr. Norman—thank you very much," he said. Then, as soon as the band had concluded its outburst, turning round to the assembly that made so pleasing a picture against the warm red background of the old mansion, "Thanks everybody," he said in a clear manly voice. "I—I'm very proud to be here to-day amongst you all—very proud of the great name that has come to me—very sensible of its responsibilities—of my duties to you all, which shall never be forgotten while I am with you and my dear mother is by my side. . . ."

Loud applause rose from the throng at this straightforward announcement. He had clearly won all hearts from the very first.

"We shall—both of us—always—er—treasure most gratefully this very kind welcome you have afforded us, and we thank you, Mr. Norman, for

the manner in which you have given expression to what I believe to be in your hearts to-day though, indeed, it required no words to assure us that a Villiers is ever welcome at Deerminster."

Vociferous cheering again echoed across the park as Nigel and his mother proceeded up the steps to the house, in conversation with the Duke of Exmoor. But some excitement was taking place at the far side of the crowd, and angry words were being exchanged. "You can't come this way," "Go back," "What is it you want?" were some of the expressions that came upon the ears of the new marquis. Then suddenly there was a startling hush as the crowd stood back and allowed three people to pass. Lord Adolphus came first, followed by Bess and a serious-looking man in a frock coat.

"Ah, Uncle Dolly," said Nigel in surprise as he descended half-way down the steps to meet him. "This is very kind of you; I'm so glad you've come."

"Are you, Nigel?" answered the other somewhat nervously as he took the proffered hand.

"Of course—why, the very words on my lips—a Villiers is always welcome at Deerminster."

"I—I hope you'll always think so," he stammered, letting go his grasp.

"That I'm quite sure," insisted the Marquis.

"Then allow me to introduce my wife," he said impulsively as he turned to Bess who had

come up immediately behind and was standing one step lower.

Lady Margaret was white with rage, but she was speechless.

"Your wife?" asked Nigel quietly, as if he had misunderstood his uncle's announcement.

"My wife—yes," consented the latter, "Lady Adolphus."

"Yes, Lady Adolphus—that's me," shouted the little woman ascending the remaining steps and waving high her pink sunshade, "and you're Mr. Villiers."

"I'm Lord Deerminster," came the mild protest of the new peer, unable to discern the sudden turn of affairs.

"No, you ain't," she cried, viciously taking the bit between her teeth. "I don't care," she clamoured, "let 'em all hear it. I tell you you ain't."

"Nigel," exclaimed Lady Margaret, unable to stifle her indignation, "I insist, turn this woman out at once."

"No, you won't," contradicted Bess, while the crowd stood round dumb with amazement, "it's you that's going out and precious quick, too. Whatever *your* name is, my name's Villiers to-day, and I don't want no sympathy, nor no consolation neither. And," she added with mock hauteur, "I remember that wherever you come from you'd better go back."

"Hold your tongue," commanded Nigel furiously.

"'Ere, Mr. Markham," cried Bess, rejoicing in her defiance and drinking deep the sweet draught of revenge, "serve them papers." She turned to the figure in the frock coat, and before Nigel had time to realize, the man had obeyed her request. "Now," she proceeded, "you can get out and let your mother tell you who you are. When your father married her he'd already got a wife—alive," she called at the top of her voice, 'Sylvia Thorne—that was 'er name, and I can prove it, too."

Lady Margaret would have fallen and dashed her head against the stone had not Nigel caught her in his arms just in time. Matters had already gone far enough and Lord Adolphus was for restraining the exuberant Bess. But she waved him aside with a sweep of her arm.

"Shut up," she said vulgarly. Then facing the astounded crowd, "and you get on with your cheering. You're here to welcome the new lord. Go on—do it. Here he is," she pointed, catching hold of the reluctant Dolly by his coat, "the only Villiers left. 'Dolphus, Marquis of Deerminster—and I'm the Marchioness."

But the cheer that was to have followed never came. Nigel and Lady Margaret had entered the door, and the crowd gradually dispersed in little knots over the park, there to thrash out the most sensational ending to a home-coming that had ever been known in the history of the Villiers of Deerminster.

CHAPTER VI

THERE are few corners of England so full of historic and royal associations as the Tower of London: there are few English people so ignorant of its interior as the Londoners themselves. Its curious mixture of ancient and modern architecture—rounded Norman, pointed Gothic and new red-brick—is but symbolical of its continuity from the time of William the Conqueror, through the reigns of the Tudors down to that of Edward VII. Whether as palace, fortress or prison the Tower of London has played a part conspicuous in English history and romance. Nor to-day is it merely an interesting collection of former memories, for still it continues to be as useful as it has always been monumental. Here in the Wakefield Tower are preserved the jewels of the nation that not all the wealth that passes up and down the London river in its whole day's tides could equal for pricelessness. Crowns and coronets and orbs of gold; sceptres and regal emblems that have assisted at the coronations of kings and queens; thousands of diamonds and precious

stones exceeding the value of a dozen kings' ransom; swords of state, orders of knighthood with their collars and stars and badges—over all this vast collection of wealth stands the grim, old tower, not too old to be useless nor too young to be worthy of its responsible trust.

But apart from its traditions and its wealth there is always a ceaseless succession of military activity beneath its ramparts. Across its squares the bugle sounds night and day; from under its time-worn arches squads of smart guardsmen come filing out with quick, rhythmic tread. Everywhere one encounters sentries and yeomen of the guard with their quaint headdress and picturesque red and black tunics. True the old moat has long since dried up, but the drawbridges are still raised every night and let down every morning. Nor does night ever end without the old custom of the King's keys being gone through with fitting military pomp and ceremony.

As you enter through the Stockade Gate and pass under the Byward Tower and Bloody Tower —grim reminder of the two murdered princes— you have the Wakefield Tower on your right and the modern guard-room a few paces beyond. Then a flight of steps brings you out on to Tower Green, now a picture of peacefulness with its trees and wooden seats and aged yeomen, but not always was it so. Here, in olden times, these very stones have seen the executions of peers, peeresses and queens. No longer the scaffold

spoils the quiet beauty of the quadrangle, no longer the thud of the axe is heard as it comes down on to the block; no longer the white stones are stained with royal blood. But at one side is still the old Chapel of St. Peter-ad-Vincula, within whose walls still rest the tired bodies of Lady Jane Grey and other hapless men and women. On the left rises Beauchamp Tower, honoured prison of many a person of rank, who, to while away their weary hours, literally carved their names in stone that in hereafter years country cousins and tourists might read and ponder. Facing it on the third side stands the White Tower, more venerable than all the rest of the fortress, four square to all the breezes of the Thames, while running along beneath its high impenetrable walls the parade connects Tower Green with the quarters of the regiment's officers stationed here.

It had been the utterance of a Socialist leader haranguing the crowd of unemployables on Tower Hill that Sir Antony Gore, Governor of the Tower, was paid a handsome salary with nothing to do in return, and all day in which to do it. But the firebrand had forgotten to mention that a sinecure is sometimes a suitable reward for an old soldier who had distinguished himself and his country in Egypt, India and Africa. Apart, too, from his personal qualifications he came of a long line of illustrious men who, whether as soldiers or sailors, statesmen or diplomatists, had always added to rather than detracted from whatever high post

good luck, influence, or bare ability had elected them to.

The Governor's house tucked away at the far corner of the quadrangle of Tower Green would be thought too old-fashioned by a Socialist reformer, and far and away too dingy and secluded by any prosperous city merchant. But to the Gores every old timber, every nook and cranny of the building was dear to them; nor were the various ghosts, said to haunt the square on the anniversary of the executions, a source of uneasiness to Dorothy, who ever since the death of Lady Gore three years since had been called upon to play the part of hostess to her father's guests. Young and beautiful as she was she had inherited all her mother's tact and genius for entertaining. No one willingly declined an invitation to dine with the Gores, far removed as it was from the West End, from both Belgravia and Mayfair. For to-night invitations had been sent out, and the guests had been received by Miss Gore with an apology on her lips for the absence of the general who, persona grata as he always was at Court, had been suddenly commanded to dine at Buckingham Palace.

During dinner someone had expressed a desire to inspect the spot where the scaffold had stood, and so finally the whole party had come out into the warm night air as a full moon cast eerie shadows from battlement and gable. A couple of beef-eaters were enjoying a quiet smoke under

the trees, but as soon as the door of the Governor's house opened and cast a shaft of light, they slowly arose, knocked the ashes from their pipes and strolled leisurely off. A gentle breeze swept through the branches as Big Ben boomed faintly in the distance and a bugle sounded close by.

"Yes, *isn't* it quaint?" agreed Miss Gore, in answer to Lady Fordyce's admiration. Lady Fordyce was venerable herself and a fellow feeling kindled a greater respect for the old house, whose roof was reflecting the beams of the moon above. "But have you noticed the old doorway?" continued the pretty young hostess, as she stopped before the threshold. It was through here, you know, that a peer escaped the night before he was to have been beheaded—they seemed to have had no lack of excitement in the *olden* days, don't they?"

Lady Fordyce leaning on the arm of her hostess advanced across the "green" now paved with stones. They halted in front of a small square plot of granite.

"And this is where two of Henry VIII.'s wives ended their days—Ann Boleyn and Katharine Howard," pointed out the fair guide, tapping the pavement with her dainty foot.

"Henry VIII.?" asked the other, who had more than once addressed a meeting of Suffragists. "Ah—it's a pity they didn't hang him too. Thank heaven, my dear, women nowadays are learning to look after themselves. When I was a girl——"

But at this moment one of the party, Mary Bandeleur, a vivacious brunette enjoying the freedom of her first season, came tripping across the square followed closely by Sir Nicol Eardley. The other guests were hunting in couples choosing for preference the more shaded angles of the square.

"What *are* you good people gazing at?" she asked, not so much for information as for an excuse to break away from a too gallant cavalier.

"Come, Mary," greeted Miss Gore, "you wanted to see where the scaffold stood. Well, here you are," she said cheerfully,—"now you're standing on the very spot," she laughed.

The girl looked at the ground with awe.

"It's glorious," she remarked with great emphasis, "but please tell me—why do you call this a green when it's all stones?" she asked with delightful frankness.

Miss Gore was puzzled. Then—

"Ah, there's Campbell," she exclaimed, as she caught sight of one of the yeomen, "we'll ask him. He's a perfect mine of information. Campbell, Campbell," she called across the quadrangle in a sweet, musical voice.

"Good evening, Miss," answered the old Scotchman as he saluted and came up.

"Can you tell us why this is called the Tower Green: was there *ever* turf here?" she inquired.

"Well," began the yeoman, "I canna richtly say: but the legend is, leddies, that nae grass will grow there," he replied enigmatically.

Miss Bandeleur gave a little scream.

"What's that over there?" she implored. "It's something black—why it's moving."

Campbell looked in the direction indicated and smiled broadly.

"Ye need have nae fear o' them, leddy," he chuckled.

"But what is it?" insisted the young girl with a shudder.

"Them's only the ravens," he explained. "Three of them we've got, and they do say as a raven lives for a hundred an' fifty year, but I hae my doots. I've been watching 'em this twenty year, but I canna very weel tell just for the noo."

And with that Mary Bandeleur accepted the escort of Sir Nicol, and walked off in the direction of Beauchamp Tower.

"Good evening, Miss Gore—how de do, Lady Fordyce," saluted Captain Carlyon who had just stepped across from the direction of the White Tower. "What on earth are you all doing out here," he questioned.

"A tour of the Tower," she answered wittily, "but what are *you* doing—and in uniform?"

"Oh, I'm on duty—matter of fact we're a bit shorthanded—Oh! How are *you*?" he welcomed jauntily as Lord Tenby strolled up to them. Then seeing his opportunity he left the other two and led Miss Gore a few steps off towards the chapel.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "I've some news."

Dorothy looked up.

"Good news?"

"I think so—but read that," he answered, handing her a telegram.

She held the flimsy paper up to the light of the moon.

"All right," ran the message. "Coming back first train. Arrive Tower before eleven—Deerminster."

"How lovely," she exclaimed, handing back the paper, "Nigel coming back to-night." She clapped her hands in ecstacy.

"Don't you see," continued Carlyon, "young Poyninge who was taking his duty has sprained his ankle, and I was obliged to wire Deerminster to return at once."

"Then he'll have to leave the reception, the tenants' dinner and all the festivities."

"Yes; I know. I'm most awfully sorry, but it couldn't be helped. So many men are away that I was forced to cut short his leave. However—it's an ill wind, you know, that blows no one good—what do *you* say, Miss Gore?"

"I don't think I know what you mean," she remarked, pretending to be annoyed.

As they turned to go back they were joined by Mrs. Anstruthers, a smart little woman with a preference for the society of young men half her own age. She was promenading with Dicky

Lascelles, a tall athletic youth who had not long had his commission.

"Can you tell me is there really a ghost of Ann Boleyn that still haunts the Tower," she asked bravely.

"Certainly," answered Carlyon. "But her Majesty only appears once a year, and this isn't the night, I'm afraid. Still, they turn the King's Keys on her all the same."

"The King's Keys?" queried the eager little woman, "are you serious, Captain Carlyon, or—"

"Indeed, they're a solid fact. They're carried round every night with the guard. Everyone uncovers to them, and the sergeant goes through a kind of ritual.

"You'll see the function if you stop another half hour. It always takes place at eleven o'clock."

"Gracious me," she cried, "surely it isn't nearly that." Then, turning to Miss Gore, "I'd no idea it was so late," she said, as they moved towards the house.

"So sorry to run away, dear," regretted Lady Fordyce coming up to her hostess and taking her hand. "Thank you so much for a delightful evening. . . . No, it's very kind of you, but I won't come back to the house—my motor's already here."

"You *must* let me walk with you down the steps, it's such a lovely night," replied the other, helping her on with a wrap. Captain Carlyon

offered his arm and accompanied them as far as the Bloody Gate.

From behind the White Tower where the three ravens were nestling among some ancient cannon, two figures stole slowly across into the moonlight. Scarcely had they advanced a couple of steps when they halted suddenly.

"Confound it all," remarked the younger, "there's my sister. Look out, get back here—behind these guns."

It was Dudley Gore and Callender. The former pleading an important engagement at his club had not been present at the dinner party. In point of fact he had spent the evening with the bookmaker in Jermyn Street. It had been anything but a peaceful meeting and Callender was not in the best of tempers. But the latter had played his cards in a masterly fashion, Step by step, point by point, he had won his way, now by terrorising, now by tempting, until at length he had nearly won all that he had set out to gain. Finally Dudley had found himself a slave to the designs of the cleverer man, and his persuasive tongue. Before he had time to realise how far he had allowed himself to be led, he had hailed a hansom and was driving with Callender down Haymarket and along the Embankment eastwards to Tower Hill. There dismissing the cab they had walked in through the gate and round by the White Tower.

"Now, then," growled Callender as at length

they emerged from their hiding-place, "I can't stop here all night. What I want to know is are you or are you not going to find the money for that bill you put Deerminster's name to? Come on, now," he insisted, "let's have it."

"I—I don't know," answered Dudley despairingly as he walked across the site of the scaffold. "Somehow. . . . ."

"Somehow means nohow," broke in the other viciously, "and that means quod, my boy, chokey. What's the good of blinkin' facts? Thing to do is to go straight at 'em and face 'em properly."

"I am facing them," protested the weak man.

"No, you're not—that's the way for you to face —over there," he demonstrated, pointing down the steps. "There it is: what do they call it—Wakefield Tower, where the jewels is and the Cullinan Diamond. That's where you've got to look, me young man, that's what you've got to take."

"I tell you I won't," came the sharp reply.

"Oh, you won't, won't yer," muttered the other through his teeth as he came close up to him. "I'm going to tell you that you will. And why? Because," he emphasised, putting his face np against the other's shoulder, "because there ain't no other way—and you knows that as well as me."

"I tell you I don't," snapped Dudley, as he felt the blood rushing to his head.

"You're a liar," defied the bookmaker shaking his fist in the young man's face. "If you didn't

know, then why did you take impressions of the keys the way I showed you 'ow? Tell me that?"

"I did it because I was a fool," answered the other pathetically, "because I was idiot enough to listen to you."

"Because you were a fool—eh?" he laughed. "Well, anyway look you 'ere," he commanded, producing a couple of keys from his coat pocket, "here they are—you see I've 'ad them made as nice as nice."

"For goodness sake put them away—I won't do it, I've told you."

"All right," consented Callender quietly replacing them in his pocket. Then dropping on to a seat under the tree, "I want to know why," he asked.

"Because of the risk," said Dudley, glancing in the direction of the house. The last guest had evidently taken his departure by now.

"Yes, there is a risk—that's right enough. But there ain't no risk about that bloomin' bill, is there?" he questioned sarcastically. "That's a dead cert.," he pronounced, bringing his big fist down on to the seat, "And so's chokey for you, my boy. It's certain—sure." Dudley drew a long breath, thrust his hands deep down into his pockets and walked up towards the chapel.

"'Ere—and what about Lily de Mario?" called the other after him.

Dudley halted at the word.

"Lily?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. She won't have much use for you when you've been to quod. Fine woman, Lily—but a bit expensive, they tell me," he added artfully. "You guv her a bracelet, and a few other things besides, didn't yer?" he asked as the young man patrolled back to him. He halted on his way, and nodded his head. "Ah," proceeded Callender, "that must 'ave made a bit of a 'ole in your share of what we got for the bill, didn't it? What with these little bits, and the bookies, you ain't got so much left arter all?"

"Nothing," groaned Gore as he ceased his wandering and sat down with face averted from his fellow culprit.

"Well, no more 'ave I," added Callender, scratching the back of his head. "Backed a few wrong 'uns, and there you are." He paused for a second, then "'Fraid you've seen the last of Lily," he remarked with a good imitation of a sigh, "she's very fond of a man with money—is Lily—but not without, And I think I've told you before, Percy Hossfield's got tons of it."

It was the summit of the art of a cruel, clever torturer, and the last remark seared the young man's most tender feelings, as if his body had been thrust with a hot iron. For the moment Dudley hesitated whether to control his feelings—whether to break out into a passion of grief or of anger. He turned with his face in the shadow and looked up at the cold stone walls of the Beauchamp Tower. Was ever prisoner so tortured as he? Were ever

bars of iron so strong as those fetters of fate that bound him hand and foot and soul? He had been a fool: even his slow brain told him that, clearly, unmistakably. Still, he was the creature of circumstance. He was fond of the girl with a wild unreasoning infatuation, but yet genuinely, honestly. He could see himself slipping lower and lower down the easy slide up which to climb was heart-breaking work. He could feel himself being dragged down by a power much greater than his own. And yet what could he do? He had already gone a step too far: he had implicated himself by the bill, he had committed a crime that in his most passionate moments he could scarce have deemed himself capable of. Had some kind, generous force taken him in hand at that moment and hurled him in the direction exactly opposite to that in which he was proceeding it might still have not been too late: but his own will was for the time suspended—he was hypnotised into doing what everything in his whole being rebelled against. He must slip and slide, slide and slip until the pit swallowed him up completely.

"She's going out with him to-night," he heard the brute taunting.

"Damn him," came the keen desire to his lips.

"Jusso," agreed Callender, ever ready to meet any change of front. "And don't I tell you that there's only one way of doing it—the way that leads up into Wakefield Tower."

Dudley's back was still turned on him.

"There's real jewels in that Tower," he insinuated, tapping him on the shoulder. "There's the Cullinan Diamond—that alone's worth—why—a million of anybody's money. There's lots of others besides—diamonds and rubies and pearls and gold enough to keep you and me for I don't know 'ow long. But you don't want to touch nothing except the diamonds. I knows very well what's in there: I went an' 'ad a look at 'em myself last week. They're set light—just a wrench, and off they come, go into your pocket as easy as easy. Let 'em lie quiet for a bit, and then—cut them up into little ones. I've got a pal in Amsterdam who'll see to that all right, and you needn't worry. . . ."

Dudley turned round on him of a sudden.

"Stop it," he implored, "I won't do it—I can't."

But the other persisted.

"Just that one Cullinan Diamond," he continued, "would keep us rolling comfortable for years an' years. Just that would mean Lily for you—Lily all the time—no Percy Hossfield, nor anybody else—just you."

"Yes, but as soon as they are missed there'd be such a hue and cry all over the place. The country would ring with it, every newspaper would be full of it. Life would become unbearable for the suspense of being found out," reasoned Dudley.

"But there wouldn't be none of that—you take

my word for it. They'd 'av to 'ush it up to save a scandal."

"What about my father?" said the young man, turning round and facing the heavy-jawed bully, "he'd be disgraced—it would drive him out of his mind."

"And won't he be disgraced when you stand in the dock for forgery? There wouldn't be no chance on this earth for you then. You *could* get out of it the way I'm telling you, and if it did come to a tight fix—well, the old bloke would get the benefit of the doubt and they'd let him down easy."

Dudley rose slowly to his feet.

"And my sister—Dorothy—who believes in me, who loves me and always fights my battles for me—what would she think of me? It's no good, Callender," he repeated, kicking away the bark off the tree with the toe of his patent boot, "it's no good."

"Then what *you'll* do," replied the other losing all patience, "is 'time'—there's no 'alf and 'alf in this game."

He pushed his hat over the back of his head and paced towards the chapel.

"No," answered Dudley, "I'm going to make a clean breast of it. I'm going to tell the whole truth to Deerminster and to throw myself on his mercy: he's due back in a few days now. I shall beg him to forgive me, and I think he'll do it—for Dorothy's sake."

"Will he? What—two thousand quid? I *don't* think," he opined.

"Well, we shall see," said the other resignedly. Then glancing in the direction of the steps, "Look out," he exclaimed, "here *is* my sister. Hist! Take a walk under the White Tower—I'll join you in a jiffy." The elder man shrugged his shoulders and slouched off into the darkness, but scarcely before Miss Gore had come up.

"Dudley," she exclaimed, "who is that man?"

"Oh—only a friend of mine," he said, withdrawing a cigarette from his case.

"No, he's not a friend—I saw his face."

"How absurdly"—puff—puff—"you talk," he observed, throwing away the match. "He's a man I've business with."

"Business, Dudley?" she said sadly, "you mean gambling. It won't do, you know—the pater's getting awfully sick with you. Give it up, dear—for my sake," she pleaded, throwing her arms around him. "Whatever it all is—have done with it and him. A man with that face cannot possibly bring you any good. You know, dear, how fond I am of you. It would be perfectly awful if ever. . . ."

Her face slipped down on to his shoulder, and a terrible feeling of shame came over him as he realised the tender care which his sister bore for him. He was her junior by a couple of years, but she had always been much older to him than that—in the almost maternal affection with which

he had looked after him through the nursery days even till now.

"Promise me—promise me faithfully," she begged finally, "that you will have nothing to do with that man, whoever he is."

"I promise, Dorothy," he assented with some reluctance, kissing her gently.

"You really mean it," she asked doubtingly as she looked straight into his sad eyes.

"I do. Upon my soul I mean it." And if ever good intention came out from the midst of a tangle of a complicated life, Dudley strove that moment to rise superior to his temptations. But human nature is sometimes weak, and when weak, then promises become forgotten and trodden under by fierce, overwhelming temptation.

"I'll just go and say a word to the man," Dudley added, "and then get rid of him—I promise you."

She believed him now, and kissed him.

"Thank God," said Dorothy, and he walked quickly across to the White Tower.

CHAPTER VII

She walked slowly down the beam of moonlight that glinted through the branches of the trees. She was thinking of many things, of the success of her dinner party, of Nigel who would soon be back in town, of Dudley who had at last made up his mind to yield to entreaty before it was too late. Frankly, she felt him to be a moral responsibility on her own slender shoulders. She understood him: her father did not. Dudley had been a mother's favourite, but Sir Anthony and his son had an unfortunate habit of being mutually irritating. Primarily the cause lay in the fact that Dudley had shewn a firm determination not to adopt the Army as his career: and this had been a great grief to the General that for the first time for generations there should not be a Gore to carry on the family connection with the Service. Finally the boy had been sent up to Oxford, but owing to an unfortunate incident he had been sent down again before his first year of residence had been completed. He was neither clever nor industrious: his one great faculty,

according to his father, consisted in choosing the most undesirable acquaintances.

At the present time nothing had been decided as to the young man's future. There had been more than one serious interview between father and son, in which half-a-dozen careers had been offered the latter, but nothing definite had been the result. That which seemed most to tempt him was to go abroad, but just as matters were going ahead something had cropped up to prevent such a solution to a difficult problem.

Thoughtless, selfish and indulgent as he was, Dudley might have restrained himself had he stopped for a moment to consider the pain which he was causing to his sister and father alike. But the wild irresponsibility of youth and inexperienced life was over him. Just to live for to-day and to worry through the twenty-four hours was his motto, if indeed he possessed any definite plan at all. Nothing mattered, provided he could keep on avoiding too much of his father's society with its consequent embarrassing questions. He was not vicious enough to cause pain intentionally: on the contrary pleasure and excitement scarcely gave him time to think of anything at all. It had never occurred to Dudley to ask himself how it was all going to end—what he would be doing six months ahead, nor where he would be doing it.

Dorothy enjoyed her father's confidence in most things, and this secret worry had been

frequently discussed between the two. Unable to see any way out of the difficulty, the General had solicited his daughter's advice, and she, woman-like, had long since expressed her opinion that Dudley's salvation lay in finding a nice sensible girl and settling down in the bonds of matrimony. It would have given the son an object in life and his father, when at last he saw what any woman always sees from the first as the only way, was prepared to make the boy a sufficient allowance provided he applied himself to some honourable profession with a fair show of enthusiasm. This proposition might have worked admirably, but Dudley was an unwilling party to the arrangement. Unhappily girls in his own class of society did not attract him. It was the glare of the footlights and the background of painted canvas that must be the setting for the wild fancies of his folly.

Dorothy could think no more. She had come almost to the door of the Governor's house. A little tired, she was about to go indoors, when a familiar voice sounded through the night. She turned in the direction whence it seemed to come, then her face suddenly brightening up,

"Nigel," she exclaimed in delight.

She allowed him to seize her hands in his, and as soon as the sentry outside the Governor's house was looking the other way, she yielded to his strong embrace. Then,

"Oh, but I forgot," she broke in teasingly,

"I'm not respectful enough to-day. Welcome to your lordship," she smiled at the same time dropping an elaborate curtsey.

"No—don't Dorry," he begged.

"Dear, dear," she consoled, "Was it annoyed at being brought back to the horrid old Tower after all its flatteries and festivities? Or is it just tired out and doesn't want to be kept out of bed?"

"Neither, Dorry—it isn't that at all. But what's happened. . ."

"Never mind what it is," she interrupted. "If it's nasty, keep it till morning. Bad news never gets worse for keeping. Isn't it glorious to-night," she went on as he linked his arm in hers. "Sure you're not tired?" she asked again as they promenaded slowly round the green. He assented readily and eagerly. "Pater will be back any moment now—he's been commanded to Court—and I know how glad he'll be to see you again."

They walked on in silence for a time. Everything was still and peaceful save for the occasional hooting from a river steamer and the distant tramp of a sentry. The warm southern wind scarcely rustled the tired leaves and caught a stray lock of her fair hair. She was happy now with Nigel by her side. Of a sudden Dudley and his exploits had been eclipsed—at least for a time. Over beyond the White Tower a few yellow lights still burned in the Waterloo Barracks, whilst from the distant officer's quarters the rich tones of a piano accompanying a clear baritone voice

came floating down the Parade. The stars had come out and gleamed like the jewels in Wakefield Tower. Such a night as this Nature had made for the telling of love.

Dorothy was the first to break the silence.

"It's very selfish of me, I know," she said, "but I'm almost glad they called you back to-day, Nigel."

He drew her closer to his side.

"Because Deerminster will want to fête you all over again—to fête us—when you go down after the wedding," she explained.

"After the wedding?" he repeated carelessly.

"Yes—after," she proceeded. "I don't want it to take place elsewhere. You won't mind, Nigel, but I always thought I should love to be married here," she pointed with her hand. They had come up to St. Peter's old building.

"In the Chapel?"—he seemed to speak as one disinterested for the time.

"Yes—St. Peter's," she answered. I love every stone of it. I've often sat in it and dreamt of all its memories—of the brave and beautiful, of the frail and fated who lie there—until I have almost linked my life with theirs. I have always thought that I should like to give that little sanctuary that has seen so many sad scenes, so much of pain and tragedy, at least one glad day to remember. Nigel, how nice it will be to bring to that shrine of broken hearts, a heart brimful of joy—the heart of the happy bride."

"Yes," said Nigel, "it's a beautiful thought, Dorry—if only it could be." He half sighed: then he led her past the chapel to an old tree. They sat down under the dimness of its branches.

"Of course it can be," she prattled on. A shadow was cast over his face so that he avoided betraying the anxiety that was eating at his heart. "Why it shall be—we'll have a Tower wedding—a real old-fashioned, mediæval marriage. You shall be all scarlet and gold, and I'll have *such* a gown, and all the prettiest girls in London for bridesmaids. Your men shall line the aisle and outside here the Yeomen of the Guard shall be drawn up in full array of scarlet hose and halbards and rosetted shoes. Oh," she chuckled, "it *will* be lovely."

"It would be—it could be," answered Nigel sadly. There was a note in his voice now that Dorry had not observed before. "But supposing, Dorry, that if instead of all this pomp and array it had to be some little shabby church—with no one to look on—no Yeomen of the Guard, no bridesmaids, no presents."

She spoke more restrainedly now. The joy of anticipation had vanished suddenly.

"Are you serious?" she inquired.

"I am—very serious," he answered. "All this scarlet and gold may possibly have to be nothing but plain, dull drab."

"Oh, it never could be quite that," she pleaded, thrusting her delicate little fingers through his.

"It couldn't be just drab and dreary while love filled our hearts and God joined our lives. No, not drab—couleur de rose: it must be, it will be."

He put his arm lovingly around her and kissed her long and tenderly.

"Darling," she went on, "you're very sad to-night, somehow. I shall begin to think that Deerminster hasn't agreed with you."

"Dorry," he replied, solemnly, "if Deerminster were all a dream: if its title and estates had suddenly melted away into mist—into vacancy. . . ."

"Well, dear, if they had," she argued undaunted, "you'd still be Nigel Villiers once again—the *plain* Nigel Villiers"—she laughed a little wickedly as she laid her finger on his lips—"that I fell in love with."

"But supposing it wasn't even that," he put in as soon as he was allowed to speak, "supposing that I were Nigel Nobody from nowhere—what then? Oh, Dorry," he asked, "tell me that you'd love me still—in spite of anything, in spite of all."

She looked into his honest eyes wonderingly.

"Nigel, you know: you ought not to want telling."

He was silent a while. Then,

"No, dearest, I ought not," he answered quietly. "I knew you would trust me in spite of anything—everything." But he was silent again as if shrinking from the performance of some-

thing that required the summoning of all the moral courage that he possessed. By a sudden determination his mind was made up, and laying all fear aside he proceeded to unburden himself to the most sympathetic of women.

"I didn't mean to tell you just yet," he began gravely. "I wanted to sleep on it, to wait till to-morrow before letting you know. Still—I can't keep silent any longer, and perhaps it's better you should learn at once."

She divined some unknown impending trouble and hardened her heart to bear it for his sake. A cloud was blown over the full moon, and instead of blue shadows unrelieved dark night filled the whole of Tower Green. It is curious how accidentally circumstance often intensifies phenomena. A mother watching by the bedside of her only offspring remembers to the end of her days that as the last breath came forth from the stricken child the booming of Big Ben announcing midnight by chance tolled a passing-bell. A murderer vividly remembers the moment the shot from his revolver had taken fatal effect, and carries to the scaffold the sound of thunder and the flash of lightning which immediately disturbed the heavens after the full force of his passion had been released. So to-night there was something ominous in the black cloud which had suddenly overcast the orb that illumined the old battlements. Nigel had not noticed it, but she, more responsive to mysterious influences, less inclined

to reason by the material laws of logic than a man's dull nature could ever allow him, understood that other forces were at work to-night, more powerful, further reaching than the philosophy of man had knowledge of. Therefore knowing she was but a woman, weak and a mere slave to circumstance, she aspired to shew her strength, to help the man she loved, to unite with him in fighting against fate and robbing adversity of the prey it was seeking to snatch for its own.

"If it's anything awful—anything that is causing you trouble but which I can share, tell me now, Nigel, and let me help you."

Nigel was thinking what a brave little woman he had chosen for his bride, what a mother she would be for his children, what a good world it was after all. But before his emotions had time to frame themselves into words, footsteps, hurried and short, were heard immediately behind. Dorothy turned round instinctively.

"It's Dudley," she exclaimed, peering through the darkness.

"Hallo, old chap," greeted Nigel, releasing his arm.

He turned towards him and held out his hand. The other grasped it limply.

"Forgive me for interrupting you," asked the youth, "but I want to speak to you now—at once: it's really awfully important," he added nervously.

Nigel understood—in a second, in a flash. Dudley had heard the news, then: it would be all

round the Tower to-night and in the papers to-morrow. He put up his hand to stop him, but Dudley could not control his feelings.

"Let me go on," he proceeded impetuously, "you don't know. . . ."

"And *you* don't know," answered Nigel, "something that I was about to tell Dorry, something I must tell your father to-morrow, something that concerns you too. . . ."

"Me?" asked the younger man, shaking like the leaves on the trees.

He drew a long breath and cleared his throat.

"As Dorry's brother you may as well know that I'm done for—ruined for life." He looked Dudley full and square in the face as a faint light darted out from the film of cloud. He was ready to be cursed and denounced by Dudley for having stolen his sister's affection. He was prepared for whatever Dorry might say, but he had no intention of flinching, and he was there for the worst to happen.

Dudley looked at him in amazement.

"Ruined? . . . . You? . . . . Deerminster? . . . ."

"Don't call me that," he demanded, "I'm not Deerminster at all."

"Not Deerminster?" (A sickly light filtered through on to his pallid face).

"No," came the firm answer. Then looking first at Dorothy then at her brother, "I never have been," he said, scarcely able to conceal a

break in his voice. "There's a flaw somewhere." He bit his lip as he confessed his shame.

"A flaw in your title?" asked the astounded Dudley.

"Yes," he answered bitterly, "in all my titles —worse still in my mother—my mother's right to the name of wife," he explained covering his face with his hand. "When my father married her the woman he'd divorced and thought was dead was in fact living still."

"Oh, Nigel," said Dorothy, laying her hand on his shoulder, "it's a mistake, it can't possibly be true."

"It *is* true, dear," he replied tenderly, "it's as true as it is terrible. I'm not Deerminster—I'm not Villiers—I'm nobody. I'm without a position in the world, without even a name to sign." He moved slowly to the seat under the tree and sank down.

Dudley took a step across in the direction of the White Tower. He was stunned—knocked senseless. For a moment his brain refused to move. It wasn't even a terrible dream: at last there was a barrier that could not be surmounted. "Without a name to sign," he muttered to himself. Phew! What would Callender say to that? He walked on for a few more yards, then retraced his steps. Dorothy was sitting by the side of Nigel. She was comforting him. But what was the good? He wasn't Deerminster—he wasn't anybody. So he turned once more on

his heel and slowly vanished from the picture into the darkness.

Suddenly a bugle call was sounded through the night.

She had heard it a thousand times before, but she started as one in a dream.

"What's that?" asked Dorothy, startled like a fawn.

"That's 'lights out,' dear—you'd better go in. Let me escort you to your door."

They got up and moved slowly down the Green.

CHAPTER VIII

DUDLEY GORE walked down the steps as one dazed by a blow from an unexpected quarter. In the dark recess where Wakefield Tower joins on to Bloody Tower he found Jim Callender awaiting him. His tall dark figure and long black coat afforded no contrast against the dull background, for the moon did not flash her light into this corner, nor even could mid-day sun scarce penetrate through. There are some angles of the universe that seem predestined to darkness and dark deeds. Where light is not allowed access, ill is enthroned. It was here that Henry VI. was murdered. It was here that Dudley Gore took the last step to the scaffold of his own erecting.

Callender was lounging awkwardly in the doorway smoking his usual cigarette as the fair youth came up. He threw away his cigarette with an action of discontent.

"Well?" he asked bluntly and glumly.

"It's no good, Jim," answered the other, "it's —it's all up now."

"He won't do it—what?"

Gore shook his head sorrowfully.

"He can't—fact is he isn't Deerminster: hasn't got a cent to his name."

"Broke and bastard," murmured the elder, summing up the situation in his own choice phraseology.

Dudley nodded.

"Well, I knew that," exulted the bully.

"You *knew* it?"

"Yes—knew it these last four weeks."

"Then why did you let me . . . . why didn't you tell me just now?"

Callender laughed cynically.

"Why didn't I tell you," he repeated. "Well, because you wouldn't 'ave believed me if I 'ad: because I wanted you to 'ear it from 'im—see? I knew, sooner or later, it was bound to come out: 'e'd 'ave to tell you and your sister—damn 'im. Did 'im a lot of good I reckon to swallow 'is pride. Didn't do you no 'arm, neither, to let you know 'ow you stood."

"And knowing this—knowing it all the time—you let me . . . ."

"Sign a name that wasn't yours nor 'is? Well, my boy," he admitted with patronising frankness, "I did: it just suited my book to do so."

"You—you infernal scoundrel," blurted the young man passionate with rage, mad with indignation.

"Look here, my lad—gently—you'd best be careful," he said, laying his clumsy hand on the

collar of the young man's dinner-jacket. There was a note of pent-up force in his voice which suggested that opposition would not be tolerated but vanquished. "Don't you start calling me names: you 'aven't many friends now, you know. Master Nigel Nameless is out of it and your father wouldn't own you if he got wind of what's 'appening, so there's only me left as your best pal: and I'd advise *you* not to put my back up with your fine speeches. They won't do—I'm not going to stand no 'ankey-panky from no one, so you can take 'eed to what I'm telling yer."

He was speaking calmly, but wild beasts often subdue their growl until with a sudden roar they pounce to their prey. Dudley seemed to realise something of this and his poor spirit, so quickly inflamed, was as quickly subdued.

"Why did you do it—how could you let me?" was all that he answered, unable altogether to master the sobs that rose from his distracted nature.

Callender inwardly chuckled to himself like the wild animal which, having lain in wait for his victim, at length finds the opportunity at hand for enjoying his spoil. Clever swindler and forger that he was, he could not disguise from his speech the pleasures of anticipation that now were his.

"I did it because I wanted you in a corner," he replied dominantly. Then taking in the angle of the Wakefield Tower with a sweep of his

strong heavy arm, "because I wanted to get you in *this* corner," he went on with pseudo-dramatic gesture, not a little pleased that good luck had allowed him a chance of playing the hero to such an incapable nincompoop, "because I wanted you to see that there was only one possible way for you to take—that way," he emphasised, pointing to the door of the Wakefield Tower.

Dudley felt himself to be powerless, hypnotised.

"Why, what is it, after all?" Callender proceeded in a more persuasive strain. "'Tisn't a minute's work, no fuss—no trouble. . . ."

But he stopped abruptly. A sentry was pacing smartly up and down the arcaded terrace above. For a second he halted, and Callender halted in his speech, too. Then in a moment the regular steps continued again, so Callender resumed his final appeal.

"Here—you'd better take the keys," he went on, thrusting the cold iron into the young man's delicate white hands. "Few 'll be the wiser," he philosophised, "no one will be the worse. Come on—take 'em," he commanded, "you've only got one chance now: you'd never forgive yourself if you lost the opportunity. Remember—as it stands there'll be just hell raised over that bill and it'll be far more 'n ever you'll be able to face. But—them keys means salvation to you and a clear run for your money besides."

A distant sound of rhythmic tramping came to their ears, becoming nearer and more distinct

every moment. Fear fell on both bully and coward, as instinctively they hid further back into the shadow of Wakefield Tower. Steadily the regular tread came on, inevitable as fate, irresistible as death.

"Wos that?" exclaimed the elder man, running his words into a terrified whisper.

"It's eleven o'clock: the Yeoman Warder is coming with the escort," answered the other. "They'll lock the gate presently."

"The devil they will. How'm I going to get out, then?" asked Callender with the despair of a rat about to be thrust into the proverbial trap.

"By the wicket," explained the young man, as he walked up and down to the entrance to Bloody Tower, restless and nervous. "I'll give you the word—turn up your collar, and *don't* let them see your face on any account."

Gradually the marching of the soldiers became louder and clearer. Already they were approaching the Traitor's Gate. In a moment they were sweeping through the old archway of Bloody Tower, imposing in their big, black busbies and the warm red uniforms of the Guards.

"Escort, slope arms. Left wheel, quick march," echoed the voice of old Campbell, the yeoman warder.

Further into the shadows slunk the two men.

"If—if I do it, whispered the younger, "you —you'll come with me, won't you?"

"No fear," answered the other looking this way

and that, half expecting every moment to be placed under arrest. "*I* leave the Tower openly; it's you that's got to do the job."

"Then I'll be damned if I'll do it at all"—this from Dudley: Yet again it was passion rather than resolve that was speaking:

"You'll be damned if you don't," capped Callender. "Don't you see, you silly young fool, that they won't suspect *you*. You're known about this place—you live here. I mustn't be seen. All the same I'm not wantin' to desert you. I'll be round there to 'elp you."

"Help me? Where?"

"I'll be in a boat—by the Tower Wharf yonder," he pointed in the direction of the Thames. "There's always one of the War Office barges there that brings things from Woolwich, and there's sure to be a boat tied up astern. Besides, the tide's pretty high to-night—I noticed it as we drove along the Embankment. You can get out on to the ramparts—you know the way well enough—you ought to by this time, and I'll be just a stone's throw away—maybe a *precious* stone's throw," he added, attempting an obvious pun.

"But how about the sentry?"

"Oh," he growled. "Wait till his back's turned and then you can throw. See 'ow simple it all is—you'll never have left the Tower at all, and *your* 'ands 'll be as clean as clean."

"True," assented Dudley falteringly.

"You'll want a lamp," suggested Callender

quickly, eager to strike while the iron was hot. "Here's a little one," he added, drawing from his pocket a small black case which at his will suddenly twinkled. "It's electric," he explained, as he showed the button. "Sée, it'll go into your pocket easy as anything."

From the terrace above sounded the clear military voice of Captain Carlyon just as the clocks in the neighbourhood struck eleven.

"Guard, turn out."

"Look out—here come the King's keys. Get back further into the dark. Come on—quick," urged Dudley.

"Slope ar-r-ms," resounded the officer's command. "Right turn, quick mar-rch." And as the guard came down and formed up at right angles to the escort, Callender slunk stealthily away and disappeared into the darkness.

Through the old Gothic archway with its sombre weather-worn stone the blue sky, now at length cloudless again, could be seen, while in the foreground the powerful rays of the moon shone down on the smart uniforms, glinting from one bayonet to another. It was a study in contrasts, material as well as immaterial—the reds and blues against the dark venerable background, the picture of well-disciplined men performing their duty to the King; whilst on the other hand two others, self-indulgent, lawless, and despicably dishonest, crouched in doorways and dark passages, ashamed and affrighted.

And so the ceremony of the King's keys was gone through once more, the old responses quaint and curious, typical of the antiquity of the buildings, symbolical of the continuity of a nation through reign and dynasty.

"Halt. Who goes there?" challenged the sentry.

"The Keys," answered the Yeoman Warder, a picturesque figure with his white locks and beard, his heavy coat and curious hat.

"Whose keys?" demanded the sentry again.

"King Edward's keys," came the reply.

"Pass keys—all's well."

"Present arms!" ordered Captain Carlyon, and both guard and escort obeyed.

"God preserve King Edward," came the unmistakable Scotch accent from the mouth of Campbell with head uncovered.

"Amen," assented all.

"Slope arms, right turn, quick march," and the ceremony was over.

Dudley had watched the sight as a boy. He had seen the ceremony gone through scores of times since. But to-night, as he hid himself in the wall while the men swung out again through the arch, little did it occur to him that never would they pass before his eyes again.

He was alone now. Callender had gone, the Guard had gone. Only himself and his conscience remained. There was a peacefulness over the whole place encompassed by the walls of the

great Tower of London. The little breeze that had sprung up in the earlier part of the evening had died a natural death; there was not even enough to ruffle the murky waters of the river outside the walls. Barges and black hulled tugs with their starboard and port lights like to jewels of emerald and ruby affixed to a vague dark background, dropped silently down the river at the turn of the tide. The roar of traffic across the bridges and in the neighbouring streets had been silenced. Only the ceaseless tread of the sentry along the terrace above disturbed the nocturne.

He had scarcely moved from the spot where he stood five minutes ago. He seemed to be looking far into vacancy, wondering, reasoning. His hands had been behind him, but slowly he brought them in front. The moon fell upon the keys, and made a high light of one of the angles. He looked round as if some face should be staring from battlement or window. He watched the sentry pass in the opposite direction. But for all that he hesitated yet again. Then pulling himself together with an effort he stepped on tip-toe to the door of Wakefield Tower, and waited. Almost he thought he heard footsteps. He would not use the lantern until he was well inside; it would be too risky. Hurriedly he thrust the key into the lock. Confound the thing! In his hurry and anxiety he had inserted it upside down; at last he felt the door yield to him, and without making a sound he slipped in and closed the door

behind. How cold it was inside compared with the hot night outside! Feeling his way up the stone steps he rubbed his hand along the wall until he came bump up against the door of the room of rooms. Where the dickens was the lock? The door had always been open when he had been in before; but that had been in the daytime with old Campbell sitting by the entrance as watch-dog. In a moment he had used the other key and found himself inside. There were electric lights there to be turned on if he liked, but they were only used on dark days, and it would be far too risky for him to use them at that time of the night. He knew roughly where the Cullinan Diamond lay. He walked round to the far side and flashed the electric torch Callender had given him, and with the smallest key unlocked the cage. Over there was the diamond with the descriptive ticket beside it—there was no mistaking it—sparkling like a thousand gems as soon as the electric rays fell upon it.

In less time than it takes to write Dudley had snatched the stone from its case, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and closing the doors as quickly and quietly as before, descended rapidly down the steps. In his haste he stumbled over the last step, but with an effort just succeeded in saving himself from falling headlong against the stone wall. His heart was beating fast and furious with the excitement and suspense as he hastened to get away with his possession. He would be

able to throw the keys into the river presently, but for the time being he thrust them into his pocket. He had closed the door leading into Wakefield Tower without stopping to lock it; that would have delayed his egress by another few seconds, and every moment was valuable. He laid his hand on the knob; in another half minute he would be outside on the rampart.

Hist! What was that? Someone walking by? The sentry? No; it was a nearer tread than that. There was some one outside he was sure, and the mere thought of it almost froze the blood within his veins. The footsteps were becoming louder and louder; they were coming towards the door. He bent low and squinted through the key-hole. There was something dark against the door. Good heavens—

"Why, what's this?" he heard a gruff voice exclaim, "unlocked?" The door was tried and opened, as a stalwart policeman, shining his lantern full into Dudley's face, confronted him. Another second and the shrill notes of the policeman's whistle were resounding through the arches, but Dudley was too quick for him. Seeing how desperate was his position and that salvation lay only in immediate action, with his right hand he hit the watchman a stinging blow between the eyes, at the same time knocking the lantern out of his hand. But the constable was heavy and not unaccustomed to rough play. Stunned as he was he wrestled with his man in a fierce struggle.

He was wearing the younger and weaker man down and would have held him fast had not misfortune caused the heavier man at that moment to slip on the stones below. With a thud he fell to the ground as the nimbler man rushed through the Bloody Gate.

"Who goes there?" called the sentry, suddenly roused by the sounds of the scuffle, "Speak or I fire."

But Dudley sped on. A shot whizzed by, and found its billet in a soft corner of the masonry. Meanwhile the policeman had sprung to his feet and shouting to the sentry to give the alarm, went in pursuit, blowing his whistle furiously as he flew. Yet scarcely had he got outside the gate of Bloody Tower than a smart electric brougham drew up, and Sir Anthony Gore in full uniform, returning from Court, stepped out, as a bugle-call sounded the alarm.

"What is it? Stop. What's wrong?" asked the soldier.

"Thieves, Sir Anthony, thieves," answered the policeman scarcely stopping to salute—"the Crown jewels—the Wakefield Tower's been broken into."

"What?" came the startled exclamation. "Turn out the guard."

"It's done, sir," shouted back the constable as he turned hurriedly to the left.

"He can only have gone one way—or I should have seen him," meditated the General. Then

as the Guard came rushing up in twos and threes, "After me, men," he commanded, "and understand there's to be no escape. You'll fire at the word." And with that they dashed on in full pursuit as the great alarm bell rang out into the stillness of the warm night.

Callender had found the boat and was waiting in expectancy of a sign of Dudley's coming. He had released the little craft from the stern of the barge, and the tide having only just begun to ebb he had made it fast to the top of the wharf, above which, by standing in the boat, his head just shewed. He had watched for the sentry to go past that portion of Tower Wharf, and then climbed out on to the quay, wondering anxiously if the timid youngster had finally relented at the last and given both himself and Callender away. He was quite capable of doing both he was just thinking, when the sound of a policeman's whistle, followed by a shot, more whistling and the clanging of the alarm bell came suddenly to his ears.

"Why . . . what the. . . . Have they collared him? Confound the little devil. . . ."

Just then he caught sight of a figure moving on the battlements of the wall.

"Jim," called the figure, "they're after me."

He breathed an oath, then—

"Have you got it?" he called back, running up nearer the wall.

"Yes—but. . . ."

The sentry came rapidly along the wharf at the double.

"Then throw it—and get down yourself—quick!"

Dudley twisted the handkerchief round and made a hurried knot. Then throwing the tiny bundle dexterously in the direction of the man, it just landed into Callender's hands. Then as Dudley let himself down from the wall Callender made for the boat again.

"Stand! Who goes there?" challenged the sentry.

"Why you do! Damn you."

And with that Callender rushed at the man and dealt him a terrific blow with a life preserver. The wretched man fell to the ground with a groan as the other leapt into the boat, and seizing the sculls rowed off into mid-stream. Scarcely had he left the quay when Dudley, scrambling out of the ditch that separated the Tower wall from the wharf, fled to the water's edge and called distractedly to Callender to put back.

"Jim," he pleaded, "for pity's sake. . . . I shall be taken, Jim . . . put back."

"Can't . . . yer must swim for it," came the only reply, as intent only on saving his own coarse skin Callender was being carried down by the tide in the direction of Tower Bridge.

Dudley realised that to plunge into the water was his only chance. At least Callender would

row to help him then. Behind him he could see them lowering the drawbridge. Another moment and the Guard with Sir Anthony had rushed across on to the wharf. He heard some one give the command to fire. He raised his hands, about to take a header into the water, but a shot whizzed through the air, and instead of finding escape in the water he fell back on to the wharf, and the limp body cast up the dust.

A sergeant was the first to come up to the motionless figure as the crimson stream slowly percolated through the whiteness of the dress shirt.

Kneeling down he endeavoured to staunch the wound, but he saw that it was already too late.

"Why, sir," he remarked, as Sir Anthony came up, "it's your son, sir!"

The fine old soldier stooped over the pallid face and kissed his son tenderly and affectionately.

"Father, father," cried a woman's voice, suddenly hastening across the bridge, "what *have* you done?"

He drew himself up and sobbed piteously.

"My duty, Dorothy, my duty," he answered simply.

They fetched an ambulance, and a sorrowful procession wended its way slowly back across the drawbridge, past the Traitor's Gate and through the Bloody Tower.

CHAPTER IX

AUTUMN had come.

The long days and warm nights were no longer. The glad hours of sunshine and summer skies had passed. There was a new scent in the air, a sharp, keen fragrance that if you were walking caused you to walk the more quickly. Nature was putting on her garb of mourning; the year was tinged with sadness. London town was more or less empty, the Season had long since come and gone, Parliament was not sitting, and the road-breakers had barely restored the condition of the streets from chaos to their original order. Theatres seductively announced their winter attractions, and the only touch of colour in the streets flamed from the posters on the hoardings. Soon the mud and rain would make the drab thoroughfares more dismal still, and in a few short weeks the grip of winter, relentless and cruel, would fasten itself on the land.

But away from bricks and mortar in the country there was still pleasure for the sportsman. The little birds had yet to be shot, and the lively house parties formed an epilogue to the

story of the season begun in Mayfair and ended on the moors. Acquaintances made in the ball-room became friendships in the country, and the sentiment of Christmas, like a coming event, cast its shadow well ahead.

The estates of the Deerminsters and the Exmoors were separated only by a boundary drive running through the midst of a large wood that overlapped into two counties. On the Exmoor side of the wood a green lane, banked up with bracken, skirted the end of the forest and terminated with a stile. At the top of the broad central drive a branch from the main turnpike road came winding in on to the soft, yielding turf. Away to the right the beaters were driving the partridges over the heads of the Duke of Exmoor and his guests, Captain Carlyon, Nigel, Sir Nicol Eardley, and Lord Tenby, who were posted in the central drive, while behind them stood the keepers ready with the second guns. They had had a capital morning's sport, and the birds had risen well. There was an appetising keenness in the air, and with a general feeling of satisfaction the Duke handed his gun back to the head keeper and turned in the direction of the stile.

"I think that's about all in this drive, eh, Patley?"

"Yes, your Grace," answered the old keeper, a nice old soul with mutton-chop whiskers. "Will your Grace finish the covert before lunch?"

Exmoor looked at his watch.

"Certainly," he assented. Then turning to his friends, "I say, you chaps, there's just time for the last drive. Patley will take you; there's only room for three guns. . . . We'll wait for the carts, Nigel."

"Pleasure," agreed the latter.

"But wouldn't you prefer me?" interrupted Carlyon eagerly. "I'm shooting like a clown to-day."

From the Deerminster side of the wood came the sound of their guns.

"Never mind," smiled the genial Duke, "but don't shoot any of the Deerminster lot: you can hear 'em now; our coverts join at the drive. And by the way," he added, "remind Dolly that I'm expecting him and his pals to lunch."

"Right ho," said Carlyon, as with Eardley and Tenby, and accompanied by the keepers, he turned off up the drive.

Exmoor sat down on a hillock of coarse grass. Nigel looked at his watch and then up the central drive.

"Exmoor," he called, "I think as you'll have plenty of guns now without me, you—er—won't mind my going back?"

"What, before lunch?" asked the other in surprise. "My dear chap, we're at least six miles from home."

"Yes—but I think if you don't mind I'd like a walk."

"What you *don't* like," he corrected cheerily, "is the possibility of meeting your uncle Dolly."

"Pray forgive me," insisted Nigel gravely, "but such a thing would be impossible."

"My dear Nigel," continued the Duke, "but it is necessary—yes, just once—for your mother's sake, you must do as I ask."

He looked down at the turf and levelled down a stalk with his boot.

"For mother's sake?" he repeated.

"It's now just two months since you and Lady Margaret were. . . ."

"Kicked out; yes, I know," broke in the other, "kicked out ignominiously from Deerminster." His blood boiled again at the mere mention of the indignation that had been meted out to himself and his mother.

"Well, well," continued Exmoor, endeavouring to calm the troubled waters; "it's two months since you came to stay with me. . . ."

"And I very much fear outstayed. . . ."

"That, of course, is impossible—don't talk rot," he said severely. "Your mother has now nearly got over the shock, and has very sensibly placed herself in the hands of my solicitor. . . ."

"Who says there isn't a case to fight." Nigel sat down on the turf and tugged viciously at the bracken. "He says that we haven't any real proof of—that woman's death."

"True: and he says something even worse than that."

"Worse?" asked Nigel. "Good heavens, what a lucky family we are, to be sure."

"I only got the letter this morning: that's why I wanted to speak to you here alone. He's been having a look at your father's will, in which he leaves everything to his 'wife'."

"I know," said Nigel uneasily.

"If, then," proceeded the Duke, "there is no *legal* wife, my lawyer says that the money would go back to the estate."

"That is—if they claimed it," added the other.

"Nigel," said the Duke sympathetically, "they have claimed it." He rose to his feet and strolled half-way across the drive. Nigel pondered a minute, then—

"Claimed it, do you say?" he called across to him. "Taken not merely our name and our family honour, but our very existence? Have they really done that, and yet you expect me to come here and to meet my uncle, to take him by the hand, as if to greet a thief who has stolen all that you possess? Exmoor, you speak strange things."

"I do," insisted the Duke, strolling towards him, hands behind his back. "I do, indeed, and in the end you will see that I am right; for the hand is the hand of Dolly, weak, foolish Dolly, but the voice is the voice of Bess—and, remember, Nigel, that it is a voice that shrieks until it gets what it wants."

"That woman?" sneered Nigel, leaping to his

feet and brushing off the dead leaves from his coat.

"The little creature imagines she's getting her own back, and like the real little cat that she seems, won't be satisfied till her revenge is complete. You remember the scene in the tea shop?"

"Yes."

"Now you understand—cause and effect. But with Dolly it's different altogether. After all, he's of your own flesh and blood."

Nigel made no answer.

"Any way he's a gentleman at heart," continued the Duke, "and I'm sure of this—you've only got to meet him and ask. . . ."

"You mean beg," put in Nigel.

"No: simply plead. Just this once, Nigel," he entreated, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "just this once for your mother's sake. If your pocket is empty, then put your pride into it and . . ."

He heard someone trampling over the dead leaves and turned to see who it was.

"Ah! here's Miss Gore," said the Duke, doffing his hat and extending his hand.

"Dorothy," exclaimed Nigel.

"We are just driving over to call on poor Mrs. Langton. Dad's waiting in the car at the top of the lane. I heard your guns and they told us where we should find you, so I thought I'd just run down and see what sport you were having."

"Most kind of you," answered the dapper little duke. Then, "Now that you are here, I want you to add your advice to mine. I told you what I feared. . ."

"For poor Lady Margaret?"

"Penniless Lady Margaret," added Nigel, and walked slowly away to hide his feelings.

"You know what to say, Miss Gore," said the duke. "So very nice of you to come. Perhaps he will take from your lips what he doesn't want from mine."

She was looking very sweet although she was in mourning and the horror of that terrible summer night still shewed some of its effects in her face. Sorrow acts differently in different natures. Some it hardens, others it softens and deepens their sense of sympathy. Dorothy Gore belonged to the second category.

"I'll do my best," she said in answer to Exmoor's expressed wish.

"Yes, I'm sure of it . . . Why there are the carts. I'll go and hurry up lunch—you won't run away, will you?" But Miss Gore protested that she must return to the car in a very few minutes. Exmoor promised to run up the lane to chat with the General, and waved her farewell.

"The Duke is right, Nigel," she said at length.

They sat down on a brown bank of russet leaves and bracken.

"And must we sink to begging and cringing?

My mother of all people would be the last," he answered.

"But you—surely you will be the first—the first to spare her pain, to act promptly for her, whatever it may necessitate. Now think, and be reasonable. It doesn't matter for to-day or to-morrow, perhaps, for you have friends in plenty. But poverty, you know, has a habit of wearing out its welcome. There are few things in the world so deadly monotonous as to be poor. And a proud woman like Lady Margaret—don't mistake my meaning—can't live for ever on the hospitality which is really only charity."

"But I'm here to work for her," protested Nigel.

"How can you—will you sacrifice your career?"

"Career?" Nigel laughed curiously. "Career? My dear girl, don't you know that's over and done with: I could never go back to the regiment—without a name."

"What nonsense," she affirmed. "You know quite well the regiment would say nothing of the kind."

"Indeed, it would say more. What could I do? If I took her name—the only name that I now have—it would cry aloud her shame every time a man spoke it. No, no, Dorothy, it can't be done—it's impossible."

"But it isn't impossible to plead on her behalf—Nigel, I want you to see that it's your duty."

"What? Go and beg from *them*—from my

uncle and that class of woman? Really, Dorothy . . ."

"Not even for your mother's sake?" she cornered him rather nicely.

"Why—of course: there's nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for her sake—nothing, if I could only remove the stigma that unjustly is attached to her name and mine. If, Dorothy, I could only prove the truth . . ."

"And you will, dear—be sure of that. . ."

"Yes, but not till I can prove absolutely that the woman my father first married is dead. There's one man who knows, and only one—Julian Merrowdale."

"But, surely," she observed, "you told me he said. . ."

"'My wife is dead'—yes: but the date—that's the whole crux of the matter—that's what we want to know . . . And supposing Merrowdale were dead too, by now?"

"He can't be," she decided, with a wish that was parent to the thought.

"Well," argued Nigel gravely, "he's not to be found. We've searched for him high and low—everywhere. The only address we have was his club. They know nothing, and he doesn't write for months. We inquired at his bankers', but they know less. We've tried advertising, but. . ."

"If, as you say, he is abroad, it's probable he hasn't seen. . ."

Nigel drew a long breath.

"And if—if he should never see after all, never be heard of, never come back, at least to England — it means — good-bye, to everything." He lowered his voice as the thought came to him of what such a condition might involve.

"Do you mean good-bye—to me?" she asked, looking into his face; but he looked down at the ground and averted her gaze.

"How can I tie you, Dorothy, to such a life as mine?" he asked as his hand took hers in his.

"Will you leave me, then?" she said sadly. "Whatever there is of wrong or disgrace it isn't your fault, it isn't Lady Margaret's. You and I are both children of circumstance. Fate has been unkind to us just now," she went on pathetically in her soft musical voice. She made a fitting centre to a pastoral picture with her glistening gold hair and her graceful figure enthroned amid the delicate autumn reds and browns of the forest. "My father, having failed in his trust, has been dishonoured—disgraced, while Dudley. . ."

She hid her face in her hands.

"It was terrible, terrible, Dorry," he said soothingly, "but he wasn't guilty, all the same—I'm sure of that."

She thought for a moment. Then,

"There's something at the back of it all. He must have been tempted—I don't understand at all. But," she emphasised, "I saw the face of

the man he was with that night and I should know it again anywhere. Savage, sinister, wicked and cunning—I can see it now." She held up her hand and looked far into the forest. "He was the real criminal: it was he who stole the great diamond, my brother's life and my father's honour, too. If there is such a thing as justice in the world that man will surely be brought to his account ere long." There was a look of determination now and her lips were closed tightly.

"But your father—he was not to blame—no one could . . . Can't you get him away? He shouldn't stay down here and brood."

"That is true, Nigel. Next week, I'm taking him abroad—to the Lakes. We shall see what good the change will do him to get right away from England; but I only fear," she added, suggestively shaking her head, "that it is too late. He will never get over it now, it will kill him in time—unless his stolen honour, his integrity, be restored to him."

"In his case, as in my mother's, it is the loss of the 'immediate jewel.' Don't you remember —'The Good in Man or Woman is the immediate jewel of their Souls'?" he said.

"How true it is," she exclaimed. "God send it to them both and put it in *our* power to win back again for them fame, honour and happiness."

He had got up and stretched out his hands to help her to her feet.

"Fame and happiness," he repeated, "yes—and love too."

"Love has never left us," she replied, her hands still in his, "and never will—in life or in death."

Very slowly and gently his arm slipped round her and drew her to himself. He kissed her long and tenderly. Then, with a merry little sigh,

"Come and take me to the top of the lane. Dad will be tired of waiting, and I promised not to be long."

He kissed her again, and together they hurried round the edge of the wood and up to the road.

CHAPTER X

"THAT reminds me," remarked Lord Adolphus, as he seated himself on a camp-stool opposite the Duke of Exmoor. They had come to the slope of a hill where luncheon was to be served. "Bess—my wife—" he went on uncomfortably, "expressed a desire to drive out and join us."

"Well, there'll be plenty of lunch," was the non-committal reply.

"Thanks: I hoped you wouldn't mind." But Dolly wasn't quite sure, all the same.

"By the way," continued Exmoor, "before your wife comes I want to ask you a favour—I want you to see if you can't have five minutes' talk with your nephew."

"Nigel?" he asked. "Well," he demurred, "if the lad wishes it, you know. . ."

"He's a first-class chap, a keen soldier, and one of the best of sons to his mother. I feel very deeply that he ought not to be robbed of his career."

"And who *has* robbed him?"

The Duke hesitated and smiled.

"Well—quite frankly—you have. Nigel's a

good fellow and a credit to his family. If only he's given the chance I know he'll make a name for himself."

"I don't doubt it."

"Then why not give him the opportunity—see that he does not lack means and that his mother is adequately provided for?"

"Poor Margaret," exclaimed the other sadly. "I'm really very sorry for her." It was clear that he felt his position and he was not happy at the thought of the pain that had been caused her.

But the Duke was little inclined to encourage any unpractical expressions of empty sympathy.

"If your brother Alaric were alive to-day," declared his Grace, "and you had left a woman whom you dearly loved, he would do something more than be merely 'very sorry' for her. He would do something far more useful, he would be a little more real in his compassion." His words were full of irony and Dolly appreciated the situation fully. Frankly, he was feeling a deep sense of shame.

"I know it," he replied, "I know it quite well. But what can I do? I'm helpless—utterly."

"And you the Marquis of Deerminster," taunted the Duke.

"I should never have been what I am had I not married," said the other, as if seeking to justify himself. "D'you think I've forgotten my

own record? D'you imagine I don't know my age? Should I have dug up Alaric's past and started all this scandal and unpleasantness for us all—should I have gone to all this fuss and worry to claim such a title as ours—simply for myself?"

"Then for whom . . .?"

"I did it for Bess's sake—entirely. Believe me, on my wedding-day I didn't even know that poor boy in India was dead."

"But surely you read the papers?"

"I didn't see them. I was confined to my room at the time. I'd been to Sandown," he explained with a pathos that was almost humorous, "and had a rotten bad day. My head was bad, I was worried with a thousand things—so somehow—I don't exactly remember why—I proposed, and there," he added with a shrug of the shoulders, "there is the whole case in a nutshell."

"So she wanted the title, eh?"

"It was all I had to give her. I had nothing else in the world," he remarked sorrowfully, "except a fine collection of debts. But for the kindness of her mother—well the fact is, Exmoor, I shouldn't have had a roof to sleep under."

"By Jove, then you paid a jolly stiff price for your accommodation in the end."

Dolly wasn't quite sure how to take the remark—whether to shew one of his rare opportunities of being angry.

"I paid what I felt was due. I made the

offer—then went to bed," he explained in self-defence, entirely unaware of the incongruity of his remarks. "Next morning," he proceeded, "a man arrived with a Committal Order. Had I wanted to back out I shouldn't have been able to. There were only two possible courses open to me—Holloway or Hymen, so I choose the latter as being the easier. Her mother found the money: then brought me my shaving water and a shady little solicitor with a document to sign, which I hardly read—a general power of attorney giving to Bess the full control over all my affairs and money. But, indeed, I had none—as I thought. So what did it matter? I signed my name to the paper and an hour afterwards was married by special license somewhere near the Strand. Then," he continued, speaking less rapidly, "then came the fight that I couldn't stop—the claim that I could not prevent. I was in the hands of others: I was a mere cipher for them to do just what they pleased with me. And here I am to-day, without the slightest wish and even in spite of myself, a Marquis without money but with a wife and mother-in-law."

Exmoor could not resist the comic aspect of the case, and broke into roars of laughter.

"Poor—old—Dolly," he exclaimed at last.

"Yes," he assented, "poor in every way—poor in pocket, poorer in self-respect, poorest when I find how unable I am to answer such an appeal as Lady Margaret's. For three long months I've

borne it, until I can bear it no more. Thank Heaven, there can be no deeper humiliation left for me."

"You never know your luck, old chap," came the mild consolation. Barely had the words left his mouth when a curious noise came floating through the trees. "What on earth is that?" he exclaimed, rising to his feet and gazing in the direction of the road. Strange sounds of screeching concertinas and excitable Cockney voices broke the stillness of the country air. But Dolly sat rigid and motionless. An expression of anxiety mixed with horror crept over his face as a terrible thought occurred to him. The raucous music swelled louder and louder as soon as the separating belt of trees was passed and a large vehicle drawn by four well-stepping chestnuts swept round into the drive.

"Why, what the deuce . . . It's a large brake, full of people, Dolly, and the servants. Why, I say, it's your livery, too, and cockade."

"Yes?" answered the other meekly, with the air of a convicted criminal resigned to his fate.

"They've pulled up at the gate now—they're all getting out. Goodness gracious—*what* a collection . . . They're coming this way—why, I believe its the . . . phew," he exclaimed, stopping short.

A motley crowd of vulgar men and young women, headed by the redoubtable Bess, poured

out from the brake over the green sward. Some in parties of twos and threes, arm in arm, gambolled clumsily on one flank while some exchanged witless jokes and loudly announced their opinions of the scenery. Those who found nothing to interest them in sylvan beauty proceeded to finish the interrupted stanza of a popular contemporary classic of the Music Halls :—

"Put me among the gurl—l—ls,
Put me among the pearls . . ."

"Shut your row," commanded Bess, all glorious in a flaming costume of pink and yellow. Then going up to her husband, "'Ere we are, ole dear," she greeted, "thought I'd be alone, did you—dear? Not me. Asked 'em all down on the Q.T.," she explained joyfully, "so's to give you a bit of a surprise like."

Lord Adolphus could not deny the last statement. Exmoor was gazing in wonder at the throng.

"These are my ole pals from the 'alls," she explained further.

"Yes, yes," replied her spouse irritably. "But—*really*, Bess, you don't suppose we can take the Duke's hospitality by storm?"

"Why not?" quoth Bess in all innocence.

But Exmoor came gallantly to the rescue.

"Of course, Dolly," he suggested. "I'm sure that we shall be delighted to welcome Lady Deerminster, and if anything that is agreeable"

. . . (Then lowering his voice). "Introduce me," he begged.

"Bess, dear," began Dolly, "let me introduce the Duke of Exmoor."

"Oh, 'appy to meet you," she replied to the Duke's bow. She shuffled with her feet and wriggled her body awkwardly so that her large black hat swayed violently.

"Lady Deerminster," addressed his Grace, "I *hope* your friends will lunch with me."

"Thank yer," she said, as nicely as she knew how. "They won't 'arf be pleased—I'm sure." Then turning round and extracting Mrs. Bissett from the variegated throng, "An' this is good old Ma," she observed smilingly, "*my* Ma, Mrs. Bissett," she explained, still further anxious to emphasise the relationship.

"Charmed!" muttered the Duke as he bowed again.

"I've met 'is Grace before," simpered the proud mother, a quaint fragment of early Victorianism in her wondrous confection of claret-coloured silk.

"Indeed?" answered the Duke.

"Your Grace doesn't remember me waiting on you. I was a maid at Deerminster once," she volunteered.

"Dear me," came the disinterested reply. But Mrs. Bissett's tongue was not capable of being easily stopped. Inwardly purring with pleasure at the happy circumstance that had brought about

so interesting a meeting, she was determined to continue the conversation at all costs. A suitable peg on which to hang her remarks being not immediately to hand she fell back to the consideration of her son-in-law, by which stepping stone she was able with the greatest ease to pass to a reference to herself.

"Not looking as well as 'e might," she said, pointing with her parasol to Dolly in anguish, "'e does get a bit down-'earted now and again, though I do try to make it cheerful for 'im: but being myself a chronic martyr . . ."

"I'm sorry you're unwell," said the Duke quickly. "Can I give you something?" he asked kindly.

"Well," answered Mrs. Bissett diffidently, "if there was a cordial . . ."

"Certainly. Smithson, Smithson," he called to one of the menservants, who took her to where lunch was being laid and gave her of the stimulant she desired. Tenby, Carlyon and the other men of the shooting party laughed without effort of concealment at the strange medley of human beings which had so suddenly assembled.

Bess, full of happiness and at the height of her power, flitted here and there endeavouring to set a new standard for all future marchionesses to follow. It was not her fault if each and every member of the brake party had not the most uproarious time in his or her life. In spite of her oft-expressed opinion that she was every

bit as good as her "betters," she was for ever hovering round the Duke of Exmoor as a butterfly round a flower. First she brought up and introduced an ill-kempt person with a cap of considerable dimensions and of unmistakable cheques. His clothes seemed to stamp him as belonging to some stratum of society midway between an ostler and a bookmaker. His fame, though extensive in suburbs where "the two-houses-a-night" custom obtained, had not yet reached the Duke, yet "Monty Mars, the Man with a Mouthful of Mirth" was a distinguished member of the lesser ranks of *the* profession.

Nor did she forget to present the "Rosebuds," a pair of good-natured, over-dressed hussies, who releasing their arms from the neck of the gentleman with the concertina advanced saucily with a wink ready in each eye. In the words of Bess, "'igh kick and eccentric" summed up their contribution to the histrionic art. Eight Rosebuds were there really, she was careful to explain, but the other six were "resting" and could not come. Then there was a terribly anaemic little man, professionally known as "the Boneless Wonder," not to mention Harry, famous for his "Concertina and Ventriloquial Act." Finding that the Duke was tiring of so much talent she continued the presentations to her husband.

"'Ere," she besought him, "can't yer be civil a bit—I'm just sick of your long face. Mike yourself agreeable—if you know how," she

pleaded. Then beckoning to a couple of the party in Homburg hats and waistcoats of a remarkable prominence with 'heavy gold alberts to match,'

"Sims and Sims," she introduced, "the musical knockabouts—my 'usband, the Marquis."

"Very pleased to meet you," said the first.

"'Ow are you, old man?" asked the younger Sim, one hand still lingering in his trouser's pocket, while with the other he gripped the frail hand of Lord Adolphus in such a hearty manner as to make him wince with pain.

Finally another leading light of the stage was requested to favour the party with a song, an invitation which, owing to a "barring clause" in his contract, he was prevented from accepting. But instead, he obliged with a vigorous dance to the accompaniment of Harry's concertina. In a moment the Rosebuds joined in, to be followed by the "Man with a Mouthful of Mirth" and others of the strange assembly, while in the background open-mouthed, respectable gamekeepers, beaters and ducal servants gazed in utter and complete astonishment at the sight.

On to this unusual scene, an oasis of cockaigne in the heart of the country, Nigel, coming back from leaving Miss Gore at the top of the lane, arrived. He peered through the throng of unknown faces, and as it happened found himself confronting Lord Adolphus on the other side of

the circle. At this moment a servant came forward to the Duke with consummate dignity and calm to announce that luncheon was served. Catching sight of Nigel, Exmoor with a stroke of strategy succeeded in arresting the music and sweeping Bess and her friends away to the lunch laid a little higher up the slope under the protection of a dozen fine old trees, where a clatter of knives and plates, the jingling of glasses and the chattering of Cockney tongues went on unceasing.

Lord Adolphus hesitated for a moment, then,

"Nigel—my dear boy . . ." he began, advancing towards him and extending his hand.

"Afraid I'm rather in the way, am I not?" he asked.

"Not in my way," came the indiscreet reply, for he answered without thinking.

"No," said Nigel, "you took jolly good care of that, uncle—I beg your pardon, Lord Deerminster."

"Don't," pleaded the other jerking his fat thumb over towards the luncheon party; "it's quite bad enough without your rubbing it in, Nigel."

"Exmoor wished me to speak to you alone," observed Nigel. "I promised him I would."

"Then let us sit down," said the other affably. Dolly was not sorry for an opportunity of being able to occupy his mind with an antidote against the excessive mass of vulgarism that was falling on the viands in the background.

"It's for my mother's sake, I'm speaking," Nigel began somewhat bitterly as soon as they had settled themselves down. "I don't mind so much for myself: I dare say that I shall be able to mug along all right in the end : but I can't stand the idea of my mother being reduced practically to the level of a pauper, to have almost to beg . . ."

"Stop," exclaimed Dolly, "I can't stand that : it isn't for a Villiers to beg."

"Yes," answered Nigel, "but have we any right to the name—am I a Villiers?" There was a pungent sarcasm in his voice.

"Yes, of course," assented the little man kindly. "D'you think I don't know it? Can't I see it for myself? When I see you there, the very image of your father, d'you think I'm not every bit as proud—and as fond—of you as if you were my very own?"

"You're very kind," said Nigel touched by the spontaneity of his uncle. And yet my mother—"

"My dear boy—do you think for one moment that I'm not quite aware who and what Lady Margaret is? I don't mind a bit what the Law says : in my heart your mother is Alaric's wife."

Nigel appreciated the sympathetic effort made, but it was difficult to reconcile theory with practice. If his uncle really believed as he spoke, why had he acted in a manner exactly opposite?

"You say you give her back that name, and

yet you take advantage of the Law and claim for yourself not merely my father's good name to which we also have a right, but his property and possessions—you take all these," he added, becoming mad with indignation, "while you leave my mother—his wife—penniless."

"I don't," contradicted the embarrassed Dolly. "Can't you see?" he protested, "I'm in this position—I'm in the hands of my lawyers. Practically I'm powerless: I've signed away every right that I possess."

"And your honour with it," put in Nigel. "You're keeping up the best traditions of Deerminster in allowing this sort of nonsense to take place," he remarked crushingly, pointing with his hand to the group in the background as a wave of coarse laughter rolled across the drive. "Good heavens, what on earth would our fathers have said had they imagined Deerminster could get to this? You're an older man than me, and it may seem impertinent for me to speak with such frankness, but I can't look on quietly and see the family going to the dogs. You and I know that these things should *not* be, while the wife of Alaric Villiers is being treated not merely with the grossest disrespect and a flow of insults, but altogether neglected and allowed to want."

The words struck home. He pondered for a moment.

"I understand, Nigel, I understand," he said thoughtfully, "but there's still one thing that I

can do—there's yet one way by which to be honest and just, to do what a Villiers should."

Nigel looked at him.

"I'm going to give you back your coronet," he went on.

Nigel scarcely believed his own ears.

"What do you mean?" he asked in amazement.

"I mean what I say—I'm going back to my old place, my old life. I'm tired of being a miserable hound kennelled in opulence. I can stand it no longer: from to-day I've done with it all." Then laying his hand gently on Nigel's arm, "I'm going to fight for you and for your mother as neither of you could."

"Uncle," exclaimed the nephew in surprise, "But if—if only I could clear her name for all time."

"My boy," put in the other cheerily, "we will. Now listen. You can't find Merrowdale, but I knew him well."

"At his club they could tell me nothing."

"But I happen also to be member. Of course you found the secretary a cipher and the Hall porter a nice mixture of Ananias and the Sphinx, but he's an open book to me, and has told me this. Now look here," he went on impressively, "I find that Merrowdale goes to Geneva once in every year—but for what purpose I don't pretend to know. At any rate it seems to be a regular habit and always about this time

he writes for his letters which are forwarded on. I hear that he hasn't missed for ages."

"Then if he's alive?"

"It's long odds he'll do it again, and therein lies our chance. Now, my doctor has had the good sense to order me abroad. Bess doesn't relish the idea and won't come, so I leave to-morrow alone. If there's any news at the Club I'll wire, in which case you can meet me at Calais. And let us pray heaven that when we come back I shall be Dolly Villiers once again and you . . ."

Nigel was about to thrust his hand into his uncle's to express his thanks, when of an instant there rose from amid the luncheon party a discordant dialogue as of several differently pitched voices each trying its best to overpower the other. A discussion that had been commenced between two of the gifted artistes had rapidly ripened into a mutual exchange of personalities.

"Don't you take a liberty," demanded the Man with a Mouthful of Mirth and cold chicken.

"'Ere, 'ere—order, order," insisted the Boneless Wonder.

"I know what I'm saying of," exclaimed Harry, purple with rage and wine.

"Then you say it 'ere," replied the Man of Mirth.

"Steady on, now," put in Bess, laying down her fork with a clatter and endeavouring to become the angel of peace.

"Very well," expostulated the Concertina

gentleman jumping to his feet, "I say that I'm right."

"And I say that you're a liar," retorted the other.

Another second and there was a scuffle, in the midst of which the Comic man received a painful swelling somewhere in the region of the left eye. In response the champion of the concertina was thrown headlong among the comestibles. For half a minute it was uncertain how the quarrel would end, but finally the Boneless Wonder assisted by the efforts of the two brothers Sims separated the disputants, and led them to remote corners there to remain until their ardour had abated.

"Stop this at once," commanded Dolly as he came into the thick of the mêlée. Then turning to the Duke and blushing at the disgraceful exhibition, "I'm ashamed, Exmoor," he said, "I offer you my profound apologies."

But Bess, even more regardful for her own pride than her husband was for his, rushed unwisely into the fray.

"'Ere—you speak for yourself," she exclaimed.

"I will," replied her husband, roused beyond measure. "Downes—the brake at once," he ordered.

"What for?" inquired Bess with feigned indignation.

"For our immediate return," snapped Dolly. It was not often that this genial little person

was angry: he was usually far too easy-going even to maintain what was but just and lawful. But there was a limit to all endurance, and to add the most reprehensible manners to a calm abuse of ducal hospitality was to stretch the spirit of unprotesting patience to its breaking point.

Bess, however, continued in a state of haughty independence.

"Not me," declined the little lady, "I ain't going back yet. If you're 'uffy, the Dook ain't."

"I've told you we're going," repeated Dolly.

"No, we ain't," contradicted the other. Then catching sight of Nigel who was standing a few paces away, "'Ullo," she exclaimed, "who's this?"

"This," said the Duke quietly, taking up the cue, "is my friend Mr. Nigel Villiers."

"Oh," said Bess, "is that what you call 'im still? Well, *I* call 'im by the same name as 'is mother's." Then turning half round to the young man she said with a supreme effort of contempt, "Whatever it is you ain't wanted 'ere, Mr. Nigel *Constable:* and it's no good your trying to sneak round Dolly behind my back. I'm up to all them little ways, and I'd like to tell you that *I*'m the person that matters here. And you can tell your mother from that I say that if there's anything she's wanting it's *me* she's got to come to. I'm Marchioness 'ere, and if she's 'umble enough, I don't say as I mightn't think

over whatever she asks. But as for you, I say you can 'ook it as fast as you like—get out."

Nigel was amused, but the Duke was stirred to protest.

"Lady Deerminster," he rebuked.

"Be quiet," exhorted her husband.

"I shall not," declined Bess gleaming with defiance.

"Very well, then. For once, Madam, I shall not ask you—I command. Come, Nigel," he called. "My nephew is going with me."

"And where, pray?"

"To the place you outrage with your mountebanks—to the place which he rightly owns and of which we have robbed him." Then, taking the young man's arm in his, he left the angered little woman standing in humiliation among the stars of the Music Hall and sauntered off up the drive, as the servants made ready the brake to return whence they had set out.

CHAPTER XI

SWITZERLAND in Spring.

A bright, clear morning, with the air full of hope and the sweet scents from the flower beds, the Garden Terrace of the Hotel was bathed in sunlight as Percy Hossfield sat down by one of the white-clothed little tables overlooking the Lake of Lucerne. A long, lank waiter was busying himself laying breakfast for two as Hossfield glanced lazily through the columns of *Le Petit Illustré*. Across the road the shimmering surface of the Lake, with a small flotilla of boats and a couple of steamers bobbing up and down gently to the little gusts of wind that now and again swept down from the hills: away to the right Mont Pilatus towered high heavenwards, while to the left the Rigi and a distant range of mountains clad in pines and virgin snow enframed the silver patch of water between.

The waiter disappeared indoors and adjusted the sunblinds. Hossfield, having satiated his curiosity, threw the journal carelessly aside on to the ground and yawned. Then looking round to the direction of the entrance to the hotel,

drummed his fingers impatiently against the wicker chair. Drawing out his watch he yawned again and laying his head far back into the recesses of the chair, gazed vaguely across the water.

"Here I am, dear," exclaimed Miss Lily de Mario, gliding gracefully on to the terrace looking as fresh as the morning itself. She vied with the speckled lake in the splendour of her diamonds and the scintillating of the long gold chain which hung loose from her neck. "Sorry to be so long," she remarked casually, as she sat down and cast up a backwash of strong perfume, purchased in Paris at thirty-five francs the small bottle. Then looking languidly around in order to sum up the other hotel guests, she reached out her delicate hand for the letters lying by Hossfield's plate.

"Anything for me?" she inquired, as he pushed a bundle of missives towards her. She opened them impulsively, allowing the envelopes to scatter themselves on the terrace and the path below. Then, dumping their contents down on to the white cloth, she applied herself to the dispensing of the coffee.

"Any news?" inquired Percy, as he quenched his thirst.

"Nothing much," she answered. "Shall I be back in time for the new piece at the Hilarity?" she asked, reading through one of her letters a second time.

"What—to see it?"

"No, you goose, to play in it."

Hossfield broke his roll in two and helped himself to some butter.

"Nice part?" he inquired disinterestedly.

"Oh—the usual," replied the beautiful Lily, "three lines and four frocks. But I don't think I shall take it, anyway," she pouted.

"Not good enough," suggested Percy.

"'Tisn't that so much," she explained. "You can do a lot with three lines—if you're clever. I knew a girl who got splendid notices and married a baronet on two lines and a silent exit." Then drawing a deep sigh and allowing the "offer" to flutter underneath the table, "I've absolutely lost all my artistic ambition," she complained, as her mouth resumed its usual bad-tempered expression.

"Nonsense," rebuked Hossfield. "Have a drop of *fizz* with your breakfast," he besought, "and don't hump. Here, waiter," he called, and whispered some instructions in his ear. The man hurried off to obey.

Few things pleased Lily more than to watch activity on the part of others in gratifying her extravagant whims and fancies.

"Has Callender been here this morning?" she asked dreamily.

"No," replied the other, doing ample justice to the breakfast.

"I wonder if he's done what you asked? It's so good of you, Percy. . . ."

"A couple of thou's not much to me," answered the young man, gulping down the last of the coffee, "if it pleases you, old girl. But all the same, honestly, I don't like it myself. We ought by rights to tell the police, you know."

"Oh," quickly interrupted Lily, "I don't see that—what for?"

"If it was known that that poor chap Dudley Gore had a bill out which he couldn't meet, it might be a hint, a sufficient reason why he went wrong."

"I know that well enough," she observed, placing her elbows on the table and toying with her earrings. "It was my fault, really."

"That's absurd, Lil."

"No, it isn't," she contradicted decisively. "I was always playing you up—boasting of your money, telling him how well you treated me. Poor devil got desperate: suppose he couldn't stick it any longer. Dear old Dudley," she bewailed, "he was a nice boy, though I know *you* hated the sight of him. I wonder if he thought of me at the end," she surmised, selfish and self-centred even in her most sympathetic moments.

"His people should have paid up the money," growled the other, pushing his chair away from the table and lighting a cigarette.

"You know very well they couldn't," complained Lily.

"Well, there was a second name."

"You mean—Deerminster, Nigel Villiers: he couldn't pay either," she replied argumentatively.

"But he was never asked."

"No more he was," she agreed. "It was jolly decent of Larry Norton anyway."

"Yes, that's all very well—but it wasn't business."

"When the boy was well—dead—his debt was paid: the bet was settled. What use would there be in smirching the boy's memory, disgracing it and at the same doing himself no good?"

"But I can't see how," remarked Percy, puffing at his Egyptian cigarette.

"*I* can," observed the other determinedly. "If Nigel ever wrote his name on that bill. . . ."

"Then it was forgery."

"I don't see that at all," she answered. Then impetuously throwing her head back and creaking her chair, "I don't know what I think," she added. "I'm only afraid—and the money's to you only a mere trifle—that you'd give it me twice over for a ring or bracelet. If my nonsense drove Dudley mad—tempted him to do what he did—well," she said, as if defending her position, "girls like me can't do much good in the world. We aren't made of the same kind of stuff as his sister. She's a different sort, and I feel quite sorry for her father—I do, really, Percy. If I can do them a good turn—spare them the shame of knowing what he did—well I shall have something to be thankful for. . . . Whatever's

that ? " she asked, as a sound of joyful laughter and the clanking metallic sound rose from one end of the pathway leading from the road.

" Only the children with their cattle bells," explained Percy. " It's a pretty custom they have about here in Spring : they come round like this once a year singing hymns for a good pasture, a blessing on the year's work."

" A blessing on their work," repeated the elegant Lily, not yet roused from her brown study. " Perhaps *their* work deserves a blessing."

" Don't get morbid, little girl," he consoled, leaning over and patting her hand. " It'll be all right in the end. Callender shall do what you want even if I have to give him twice the money —there." She seized his hand gratefully for the sympathy. " Hallo," he exclaimed cheerfully, " here come the kids, now let me see you looking as happy as they do."

A crowd of healthy, high-spirited little brats rushed gleefully up the path each with a large brown cow-bell slung round his waist by a wide leather belt. The little mites of girls followed closely after, carrying posies of the first Spring flowers gathered in the sheltered valleys, where sun had hastened their coming and the cold blasts from the mountains had not been able to hinder their growth. Spreading themselves out in an irregular line in front of the terrace the children began their Spring song :

" The winter now is ended
At last King Sol returns. . . ."

As soon as they had ended, the smallest child of the crowd, a shy, flaxen-haired little girl, toddled smilingly up to Lily and laid a small bouquet in her lap. Overcome alike by the sudden advent of the youngsters and the old-fashioned plaintiveness of the melody which they sang, Lily felt her hard heart moved: the womanhood in her struggled out above a nature composed for the most part of shams and selfishness. With tears in her eyes she picked the child up in her arms and her passion overflowed in caresses. In that one moment, when the sense of motherhood triumphed over all else, she realised for the first time in her life all the wasted hours and opportunities of her existence. The little flame of goodness which flickers at times in the basest and weakest of us all was still alive, threatening though it was to smoulder away for lack of the divine oil of kindness. A complex mass of circumstances, partly of her own selecting, partly otherwise, had moulded such character as she possessed. The love of adventure and pride of heart found her in Lucerne instead of being the wife of a poor but decently-bred son of a distinguished family now mourning his death. She hugged the child again, then restoring her gently to its mother earth sent her tripping back to its fellows with a golden sovereign in its chubby little hand and an impress of warm kisses on its rosy cheeks.

As the laughter and merry shouts of the

children died away beyond the distant bushes, she sank back into her despondency and cast her eyes towards the mountains.

"Looks like a storm coming," she said presently with a little shiver.

"Only a snow-cloud on the mountain," thought Percy. "Regular blizzard up there, I'll bet," he added; "sunshine and flowers down here. Jolly wonderful country, isn't it."

"Yes," said Lily, thoughtfully, "it *could* be a veritable paradise—a garden of Eden."

"Though the frocks are a bit more expensive—eh?" jilted Percy, unable to discern the mood of the girl.

But Lily continued to look at the mountain.

"Good morning," greeted a hoarse voice at the back of her chair.

"Oh, good morning," she responded, turning half round.

"Mornin' Callender," said Hossfield, in the act of lighting another cigarette. "Looking for someone?" he asked quizzingly, as he threw away his match into the midst of a bed of flowers. Callender was walking restlessly up and down the terrace with an expression of anxiety on his face. For a moment he did not heed Hossfield's remark, so intent was he on his morning's meditation.

"No, no," he answered at length, "I was only just. . . ." But he failed to finish his sentence, and removing his hat instead scratched the back of his head.

"Bit jumpy this morning, Jim?" inquired Percy.

"Well," he replied, "I don't feel exactly myself —that's a fact."

"Have you done my job yet?"

"Yes," replied Jim, drawing a chair and sitting down on Hossfield's right. "I 'eard only this morning, and that's why I come along at once. 'Ere's Larry Norton's letter," he remarked, laying the missive on the table. "You know what I lent on the bill. Under the un'appy circs. I won't ask no interest," he conceded. "Good 'eart Larry 'as—though 'e is a money-lender." Then, picking up the letter again, "'If any friend of the family cares to advance the actual cash, you 'ave my authority to deal,'" he read slowly and deliberately. "There you are," said Jim.

Percy scanned the letter through and placed it in his pocket book. "Quite right," he approved, "and the bill?"

"It's 'ere," he observed, as that also was handed to Hossfield, who, glancing carefully through it, handed it across to Lily. He took out a number of bank-notes from his pocket book, and counting them out on the table, "You needn't talk about it you know, Jim. Lil doesn't want it mentioned," he said, as he folded the crisp bundle and handed them over.

"Not me," consented Callender, as he counted them through again and placed them in his inside

pocket. "What's done," he explained redundantly, "is finished. And sooner that's in the fire," he pointed to the bill in Lily's hand, "the better."

"That's exactly where it's going," said Percy, as he took back the paper from the delicate fingers of Lily. "Much obliged," he grunted, as he pushed the paper in his pocket. "Have a drink, Jim?"

Jim expressed his preparedness, and Hossfield poured out a glass of Heidseick which the waiter had brought only a few moments before.

"Here's luck," he wished, as he swallowed the draught at one gulp.

CHAPTER XII

"GOING home soon?" asked Hossfield, as he drank to the other's health.

"Not just yet," answered Callender. "I've 'ad a nasty cold on me for weeks: seems to 'ave settled tight," he went on as he smote his chest with his heavy palm. "Doctor says—er—" he hesitated for a word, "as 'ow I ought to stop over the winter. Treacherous place London is at this time of the year," he added, with a serious shake of the head.

"I'm afraid that you'll find it beastly dull a little later on," suggested Percy. "What you want is some nice place where it's a much warmer climate than we get here. Why don't you go nearer to the equator? You ought to have been where I was the winter before last," he bragged, taking another sip of the wine.

"And where was that, then?"

"India—that's the place. Wonderful time—marvellous. Talk about scenery, Jim," he emphasised with a wave of his hand in the direction of the snow-capped mountains, "why this place isn't a patch on it. 'Course in a

sense it's entirely different, as you might say. Too many damned blackmen about, and all that, but plenty of shooting, my boy—why you remember the Rajah of Ringpore?" he stopped in his narrative.

"I should smile," was Callender's reply. "Wasn't 'e the bloke as used to rent a box at the Hilarity by the month? Used to think nothing of giving his cabman diamond rings, I *did* 'ear."

"That's right," agreed the other. "You never in your life saw such jewels as he had in his palace. Rubies an' diamonds and all sorts—handfuls of 'em, and yet he isn't satisfied, always on the look-out for something better. It's my opinion," he offered, "that there's more than one little lot has found its way out there without any questions being asked." He winked significantly from the corner of his right eye and added, "If it's big enough—and good enough—some of those Rajahs will buy anything out there."

Jim arched his eyebrows and found his attention riveted.

"Why," proceeded Hossfield, "you remember the story of the Indian prince who turned up at a Duchess's reception wearing a big bracelet that had been stolen out of her own house ten years before?"

"That so?" asked Jim slightly incredulously.

"It's an absolute fact—I'd take an oath on it," affirmed Hossfield. "There's a lot of things that don't always get into the papers," he remarked,

as one who was in the know. Then drawing a breath and carefully noticing what effect his words had caused, "Yes," he remarked, "India's a wonderful place, and I shouldn't wonder a great deal if the Cullinan Diamond from the Tower gets there before long, unless they find it precious quickly."

"Nor me," observed Jim uneasily, as he rose to his feet and began to walk up and down again, "I shouldn't wonder at all. It couldn't well be dealt with anywhere in Europe—that's a cert." Then walking a couple of paces along the terrace, "'Ow do you go to India, Percy?" he inquired.

"What, from here, do you mean?"

Callender nodded his head.

"Let's see," began Percy thoughtfully, "why—over the frontier to Italy—that's the first step."

"By train?" asked Jim.

"Yes, the train takes you through one of the big tunnels. That's the usual way. In the olden days, of course you went over the pass yonder," he pointed down towards the extremity of the lake, "and then stayed a night at the Hospice, but scarcely anyone uses that way now."

He saw that the subject was of interest to Callender, and for himself it was not unpleasant to air such knowledge as he possessed in the presence of Lily, although she appeared to be far more interested in the pages of *Le Petit Illustré*.

"Before they made the tunnel it took you till nightfall for a two-horse diligence to reach the top. Nowadays, by train you get through to the other side in no time at all. You run straight down to Brindisi and catch the mail steamer there." Then, turning round and looking up from his chair, "It's a trip *you'd* like immensely," he opined.

"Yes," said Jim shortly, "I dare say I should." But he was almost too busy thinking to wish to talk much.

Lily pushed the paper aside and looked in boredom at the people passing along the road.

"By the way," remarked Percy with a sudden inspiration. "We were talking about the Tower just now. D'you see that poor beggar of the sentry is still hanging between life and death." He picked up the journal and held it out for Callender, but Jim did not accept it.

"Bad as that is he—why I thought he'd recovered." Callender thrust his hands into his pockets and wondered.

"Well—the papers seem to say he's had a relapse again. Suppose if he does kick the bucket it'll be a murder charge against the man that got away.

"Will it be murder?" repeated Jim, as he flopped down into his chair again and looked over in the direction of the woman.

"Oh, Percy, don't talk of it," she protested, "it's all too dreadful. Whenever I think of it. . . ."

"Same here," agreed Callender with a shrug of the shoulders. "I ain't bothered much with nerves, but . . . . gi' me another drink, will you, please?"

"Certainly," said Percy, as he poured out some more wine. Jim lifted the glass to his lips with trembling hand. "Jim," he said in a quiet tone, "if I was you I shouldn't take too many, old chap—not if my hand shook like that."

"'Tain't the booze," expostulated Jim as he drank the good wine, "'tain't—honest. Fact is my heart's a bit funny like. Goes so queer at times that I always have to carry a flask with me. Wonder if you'd mind. . . ."

He drew the flask from his pocket.

"With pleasure," interrupted Hossfield. "Here, let us fill it for you." He handed it to Lily who slowly poured into it from a bottle of liqueur brandy that stood on the table. Then, turning to Callender, "I'm going in to write a couple of letters: Lily will look after you," he said, and vanished indoors. Callender picked up *Le Petit Illustré*, but it was all in French, confound it. A waiter came quickly on to the terrace and cleared away the remains of breakfast. Then a fussy little man with short-cropped hair and a perpetual smile appeared at the entrance to the hotel. Monelli was half Italian and half Swiss, possessing the sagacity of the first and the money-genius of the second. As Callender looked up from his paper he saw the very man who might be useful,

so excusing himself to Lily he strode across the terrace and was greeted by the little man with a bow and a look of pleasant, if feigned, surprise.

"I say, Monelli," growled Callender as he came up to him.

"Ah, Monsieur Callender," welcomed the other.

"What's that old coach thing doing out there?" He pointed with his hand to the road.

"Ah," answered the little man in his high pitched voice, "that used to be the Poste-Diligence."

"Used to be? Then what is it now?"

"Now," replied the landlord, his eyes opening wide, "now it is—well, what you would call a curiositee." He laughed gaily at his little joke.

"Yes, but where's it going?" inquired Callender, not inclined this morning for much humour.

"To work for nothing," answered Monelli. "Just think of it—to-day a fête-day when you can't get a conveyance in the whole of Lucerne. I send my two horses with this to take le bon Père Victor up the mountain—half-way up the Pass indeed," he gesticulated. "There is a châlet where a poor woman all alone needs the Consolations of the Church: so I send, and all for nothing. . . ."

"Dooced good of you," was Callender's comment.

"Ah, well," reasoned the sagacious Monelli with his head on one side and a look of resignation on his face, "when one keeps an hotel. . . ."

"Look 'ere," said Callender, cutting him short, "if that old rattletrap's going that far for nothing, can't it go a bit further for pay?"

"For pay?" ejaculated the other, scenting unexpected remuneration for a good deed.

"Yes," proceeded Callender, in his most persuasive manner. "Anything—in reason, you know. I can't stand the choke in your long tunnels," he explained splendidly, "lungs not as good as they should be. I'm going on to Italy about some important business. I want you to 'elp me: can't that old coach take me?"

"Ah, sir," demurred the other, "but so long a way. . . ."

"Come on now," demanded the other, summing up the situation, "what's the price?"

Monelli waited for the prompting of the money-genius.

"As far only as the first village on the other side, and no further?" began the landlord.

"Well, how much?"

"Oh, but it is so early in the year," he complained relenting.

"I'll give you five pounds."

Monelli sniffed curiously. "And the old post road is dangerous . . . ."

"Well, I'll make it double—ten pounds, come on."

"And if you are caught in the snow you may have to walk . . . ."

"Oh, give it a rest," begged Callender. "I'll make it fifteen, and not a penny more; now how about it?"

Monelli nodded assent: what time he wondered to himself that any should be unable to love the English.

"It's settled, then?" asked Callender as he counted out the money.

"From the moment that Father Victor descends the Diligence is yours, Monsieur—so far as the first village. But I have warned you, be careful, be watchful."

"Thanks; I always am," thought Callender, but he did not say it.

"Then I go away at once to the postilions; you will start almost directly." And with that he ran off and left Callender alone. Jim strode back to the terrace, found Percy and Lily happily sunning themselves, and his flask filled, so stating that he was going in to his room he retired into the hotel to prepare for his journey.

"'Xcuse me," he apologised, "may I borrow this?" he asked as he picked up an English paper three days old.

"Certainly," answered Percy.

"Thanks—thanks very much," said Callender, as he caught sight of a paragraph which somewhat startled him.

"What's the matter with Callender?" asked Hossfield as soon as the other had disappeared.

"Oh, got a little run down and a bit of a cough too," replied Lily, not anxious to pursue the subject. "He's always just the same at this time of the year."

But Percy was not convinced.

"I fancy there's something more than a cough that's the matter," he opined. "There's something curiously restless about the man—never stops in one place more than three days a time. We saw him at Basle, didn't we? Then at Geneva, and we just missed him at Aix. I can't understand the man at all, for he never seems to get any enjoyment out of travelling, and each place seems to worry him more than the last, Still," he added with a shrug of self-satisfaction, "I suppose that's his business. He's got what you wanted, and now that it's all over and finished with you'll forget it, won't you?" he asked.

"I shall never forget what you've done," she said as she gazed vaguely towards the entrance of the hotel. "Percy, Percy," she suddenly exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. It was the nearest approach Lily had ever made towards getting excited. Her companion turned round and looked in the direction indicated, and there just within earshot stood Nigel Villiers talking to Monelli.

He was inquiring if a telegram had arrived

for him, and Monelli hurried off forthwith to see. As he approached slowly along the terrace, looking about him Nigel realised scarcely anything more than the mere fact that two people —a man and a woman—were sitting a few steps away. It was not until he had come face to face with them that he realised who those two persons were.

"Hullo, Villiers," said Hossfield rising, "why, how are you?"

Nigel returned a civil remark, then stepping back Hossfield added, "I don't think you know Lil. Allow me . . ."

But there was a stop. Villiers drew back as the glow forsook the cheeks of the fair Lily. "If you will excuse," said Nigel.

"Why, what do you mean?" demanded Hossfield in anger.

"I mean," replied Nigel calmly, "that some day I hope to marry the sister of Dudley Gore." He cast a glance in the direction of Lily. She averted the gaze and shifted her position uneasily, and the basket chair creaked in complaint.

"Well, what of that?" questioned Percy, in spite of the quiet protests of Lily.

Nigel hesitated. "Must I—need I put it into words?" he asked.

"Please—I insist. Will you do so now?"

"Very well; if Miss de Mario will excuse us I will ask you to walk with me as far as the end of

the terrace." She bowed awkwardly and the two men walked slowly away.

"You've asked me for the truth, Hossfield," he said as soon as they had passed the entrance. "If you insist then you shall have it. I attribute Dudley's ruin to your . . . ."

"To Lil?"

"Yes," answered Nigel. "If a weak lad falls under bad influence . . . ."

"A wrong 'un goes wrong wherever he finds himself," returned Percy fiercely. He was maddened at the insult he imagined had been levelled at Lily. He had always hated young Dudley, always been jealous. Lily had told him a good deal and he had imagined a good deal more. But to say that the idol of his eyes was the cause of the death of Dudley Gore was going too far for anything. "Look here," he went on, "I'll tell you something about him that I dare say you don't know, and his people don't know, but which all the world would know in a minute—if it wasn't for Lil. You can say what you like about the little woman. It's easy enough to throw mud, and it has a way of sticking, no matter who throws it. But she's the best-hearted girl in this world if there's any one in a hole. Now, look here, Villiers," he asked as he took the bill from his pocket and held it in front of Nigel's eyes, "Is that your signature?"

Nigel stopped and examined it closely.

"Mine?" he asked, as the blood rushed to his temples, "mine?"

"Yes. Did you put it there—or did he?"

"Good heavens," exclaimed the other as he handed back the bill.

"Would you like to take it up?" asked Percy.

"I?"

"You can't, and never could," said Hossfield, "it's forged and you know it. If his sister knew, it would break her heart, and his father's too. You don't need to think much in order to realise what it would mean if this were suddenly published to the world. We're none of us saints, but I'll tell you this, Villiers, and you may as well know it at once—I bought this bill because Lil asked me, because she wished to save you all from sorrow and shame. Dudley had been kind to her, and though he and I never exactly hit it off together, yet Lily was fond of him, and that was good enough for me. I bought that bill to chuck in the fire, but I'm going to hand it over to you instead. You can keep it and look at it, and think of it whenever you're going to say what's neither just nor fair to Lily de Mario."

They walked back to where the girl was sitting. Hossfield went down into the garden, and crossing the road sped off to a flower shop. Nigel went up to the girl as she was about to pass indoors.

"Miss de Mario," he said stopping her, "one

moment, please. I beg you to forgive me. I made a mistake just now. Please accept my apologies. Percy has explained it all to me. I was under a delusion at the time."

She gave a curious little nervous smile.

"Oh please Mr. Villiers," she answered, "let us say nothing about it. Burn it at once, and forget . . . ."

He thanked her in the nicest possible manner. "It may mean more to us all than you think; it may help to solve the mystery that hangs around that poor lad's death."

"It can't do that," she said trembling.

"Indeed it can. It may find us a proof of what drove him to—what he did. It may be a clue to the man who was with him on that fatal night." Lily suppressed an expression of surprise. "Only one person saw his face, but that one person would be able to recognise it again, and she is to be here to-morrow—Dudley's sister."

Monelli came out on to the terrace and, looking round to find Nigel, came up with a telegram and hurried inside again.

"At last," exclaimed Nigel as he hastily tore open the envelope and excitedly read its contents.

"Good news, I hope," drawled Lily.

"Yes," answered Nigel, as he glanced again at the paper, "perhaps it may be; perhaps the best news in the whole world for us all. For I

learn now that the man we've been hunting for months, Julian Merrowdale—the one person who can give us back honour and name—has at last been traced. My uncle wires from Serrano: 'Merrowdale left an hour ago by diligence for the High Pass. Am following at once. Meet him before he reaches Geneva or we lose sight of him again.'"

"You're going to make sure, then, of meeting him?" asked Lily.

"Indeed I am—even if I have to climb the Pass myself. Let me see," he added meditatively, "from this side I should be at the Hospice before he is, but there's not a moment to lose. Forgive me," he said as he thrust the letter into his pocket, "I must go and see about some conveyance. I suppose Monelli will have horses." And with that he doffed his hat and ran down the terrace.

Lily left to herself and her thoughts wandered leisurely through the gardens, not quite sure whether to feel happy or worried at the trend of affairs. She had many regrets, yet in more respects than one matters were developing along far better lines than she had any right to expect. After the tragic death of Dudley, which made a sensation for the Press during the rest of the summer, and led to the immediate resignation of Sir Anthony with considerable pain to every one concerned, to say nothing of the agitation that was aroused in the country, Lily had been living

in a state of the highest nervous tension. Every time a knock came at the door she expected a detective to summon her for being an accessory in connection with the crime or at least as an important witness at the inquest. For a whole week after she had never dared to enter the theatre, lest on the way thither she should be arrested. Following the disappearance of the famous diamond a Parliamentary Commission had been instituted to enquire as to whether the Crown jewels and the national treasures were adequately guarded, and still further restrictions had been recommended as a result. Not until the young man's death had she realised that in her selfish nature there lurked a kind of affection for him. In the bitterest moments of her self-introspection she half regretted sometimes that she had not accepted his offer of marriage and so saved the terrible anxiety that followed. She hated all kinds of trouble and worry, and perhaps—she thought—Sir Anthony, in spite of Dudley having neither money nor prospects, would have seen to it that they did not want. But Percy had been more than considerate in her trying time, and by his sympathy and handsome presents had succeeded in turning her thoughts into other channels. An invitation to spend the winter and spring abroad had been seized on with alacrity; so throwing up her scanty lines, and leaving the gorgeous costumes to fall on some-one else, she had temporarily at least abandoned the stage, and

the footlights for some time knew her not. Her future plans were now uncertain, but it was enough to be out of London, so she took consolation from being even where she was now, only hoping that no further worries would come across her flower-strewn path. She stood looking at the lake for a moment from the extremity of the garden and then, wearied of the picture, went indoors. As she passed through the luxurious lounge she ran into Callender, who hurried her off to a deserted corner.

"I say, Lil," he asked excitedly, "did Percy give that bill to you?"

But before she had time to answer he followed the question up with a command. "Get him to burn it as soon as you can," he ordered. "'Tisn't a thing to be left lying about," he explained, "getting into wrong 'ands p'raps. For poor Dudley's sake, burn it as soon as ever you can."

"He's given it to—Nigel Villiers," she said, as she leaned herself up against a massive fireplace.

"What?" asked Callender eagerly, "Is *he* here?"

Lily nodded. "And he thinks it may be a clue to the man who was with Dudley on that night," she remarked without showing anything in her expression. "No one saw that man but Dudley's sister, and she is coming on here to-morrow."

Callender looked down at the pattern of the Turkey carpet and then at Lily. Then throwing

back his coat, and thrusting his thumbs into his waistcoat—

"I shan't be . . . ." he began.

But Lily felt no sympathy for the big brute of a man.

"She may meet *you* before long," observed Miss de Mario, rejoicing at his discomfort.

Callender looked at her. He was not inclined to put his trust in women ever, but he had been a good pal to Lily, he believed. He knew she had dangled Dudley for a long time at the end of a weak string, but he knew, or thought he knew, that the entire affection was not on Lily's side. He had done many a good turn to Lily. Had he not accommodated her more than once when she was out of a "shop," when the theatre had closed down for various reasons and her salary of a few pounds was not coming in? She had professed to be very thankful at the time, but the matter had as quickly slipped from her mind. Had he not undertaken the indignity of pledging her diamond rings for her when times were bad, had he not given her many a good tip for the Derby and St. Leger? Yet now in spite of all this, in spite of her prosperity through Hossfield's bounty she seemed to be turning on him in the very moment when he could least bear it.

"You—you ain't going to give me away, Lil?" he asked, "you ain't going to say nothing about me—are you?" He stopped short and the girl saw him take a small dark bottle from his pocket.

Instantly she realised what that meant. It carried her back with a sudden swoop to poor Ada Renshaw who, the night she was jilted, was found lying on the floor of her flat with just such a bottle clutched in her hand. It made her shiver as the recollection came back vivid before her eyes.

"What's that you've got?" she demanded with a look of horror.

"Something I takes when I can't sleep," Callender answered grimly. "If you take enough you don't never wake no more." His fingers wandered instinctively to his throat and nervously stroked the loose skin. "You ain't going to give me away, Lil, are you?" he pleaded again.

"Put that bottle away," insisted Lily, "and I'll tell you." He obeyed, and she proceeded. "What do I know to give away?" she asked, fencing. "I've warned you, and that's all. If you don't wish me to say anything, don't tell me anything—I don't want to hear it. Look here, Jim, I'll tell you straight, I've had enough of this business: I don't want to be mixed up in your shady schemes any longer. You can look after yourself—you're big enough and strong enough. You go your way and I'll go mine. I blame myself a good deal for what happened to Dudley, but I blame you a good deal more for sending him to his death." (Her temper was rising and carrying her away.) "But if what I've done sends you to the hangman—well—it'll

be a good riddance to bad rubbish. Now go," she said fiercely, "for heaven's sake, and never come back again. For your own sake go while there's time."

She broke into half-subdued sobs, and covering her face with her hands moved slowly up the marble staircase.

Callender turned on his heels and threw himself into the deep recesses of a luxurious settee in a remote corner which commanded the entrance to the hotel. Just as he had made himself comfortable he caught sight of Monelli having a conversation with Nigel. Straining his ears, seeing yet unseen, he could just catch the dialogue.

Monsieur Monelli was saying, "It is the only way—you cannot get another conveyance in all the town." Then looking around and pointing in the direction where Callender was sitting, "That gentleman has for himself taken my diligence—he is English. Surely if Monsieur were to ask. . . ."

Nigel was thinking of the journey all the time and had not troubled to turn in the direction indicated. "I must do something," he muttered. Then turning on his heels he collided with a man standing by his side. "I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, and found it was Callender.

"Mornin' Mr. Villiers," said the burly man, "anything I can do for you?"

Nigel began a reply but stopped suddenly as he

recognised the man whom he had not seen since Sandown.

"Don't mind asking," persuaded the other, "I don't bear no malice. You want something? I heard the landlord talking to you."

Nigel Villiers was not in the habit of asking favours from anyone—least of all from a bookmaker. But there was one idea in his mind and that was to reach the Hospice that night, and for that end he was willing to put up with any unpleasantness.

"You have taken the diligence, they tell me," he said. "I wanted to know if you would let me take it instead—I'm quite willing to pay. . ."

"Oh," answered Callender, "is that it? Well, I'm sorry to say. . ."

"Won't you agree?" pressed the other. "It's of the greatest importance that I should reach the Hospice to-night."

"Where is the 'ospice'?"

"Just at the top of the Pass. I want to get there immediately."

"Same 'ere," laughed Callender.

"I tell you I'm willing to pay whatever is right and proper."

"No bet," decided Callender artfully. "You're warned off, Mr. Villiers, but if you ain't too proud to travel *with* me, I shall be happy to give you a seat. Will you take it?" he asked with the air of a man who is conferring a favour, and who, all the time, knows that he is doing it.

"Well—thank you," expressed Nigel, "my business is so important, so vital. . . ."

"Oh, don't apologise," stopped Callender.

"I'm really greatly obliged to you," repeated Nigel. "I shall be delighted to come—many thanks."

"Don't mention it," requested the other. "I ain't 'arf such a wrong 'un as you think, Mr. Villiers: I'm always glad to pay back a good turn for a bad 'un,'" yet somehow the words scarcely seemed to ring true. "You've got your luggage together? Very well, here's mine, too. Now, where's that fellow Monelli?"

The little man came running in from outside followed by Father Victor. "You must start, gentlemen," he said, "the diligence waits for messieurs."

"Right you are," said Callender, as he allowed Nigel to go on ahead while he himself stopped for a moment near the settee and, withdrawing the little blue bottle from his pocket again, poured its contents into his flask.

"I'm ready," he cried, as he gathered up his rug and dashed out of the hotel, down through the gardens and to the road where the diligence, with Father Victor and Nigel, was awaiting him. In another moment the door was slammed, the driver whipped up his horses, and the diligence was speeding on through the town down the street and past the cathedral in the direction of the mountains.

CHAPTER XIII

HIGH up on the Alps, situated between the heavens and the everyday world beneath stands the Hospice de St. Bernard. Flanked on one side by a forest of pines, and on the two others by towering mountainous heights, the fourth was open to receive the narrow road which ran down to it from the road across the Pass. Everywhere is snow, not the kind that accumulates in flakey forms in many parts, but hard, virgin masses tinged with a delicate steel-blue and hanging firmly on to tree or rock.

The universal stillness, the detachment from the busy world and the pure natural beauty of the little hollow where the Hospice nestles make it an ideal situation for a band of Religious. Even to this day the seclusion is varied only by occasional travellers breaking their journey on their way across the mountains. But since the introduction of railways and tunnels these visits are fewer than formerly. Sometimes a devastating avalanche sweeps everything before a cluster of châlets lower down the mountain side, and a few

head of cattle and sheep grazing peacefully in the clefts of the mountains. Many are the times when the good monks of St. Bernard have gone out with their dogs in the snows after one of these disasters to seek for some traveller lying dead or dying in the grasp of the cruel cold. A few days of careful nursing and the prayers of the monks have restored the unfortunate man, and he has passed happily on his way to the country below. Sometimes the worst is realised at a glance, and the body is given its Christian burial, after the solemn procession has wended its way through the stillness of the untrodden snow to a little corner where the biting wind blows with less vigour.

For fifty years the Hospice had known only one Abbot. Entering the order while in his "twenties," he had lived out his life in meditation and good works. On the day when the good monks were keeping the Eve of the Feast of the Annunciation of our Lady, the weather had been singularly bright and fine for so early in the year, but towards the afternoon the sky had clouded and a heavy storm had swept down covering both rock and trees with another white layer. Fortunately it had not lasted long, but there was more to follow, and for this reason it was deemed wise for a little party that had ascended thus far to seek the hospitality of the Hospice for the night.

"Was ever anything so annoying?" remarked

Miss Gore, as Father Felix ushered herself and Sir Anthony into the warm building. "The guide absolutely refuses to go on."

She removed her thick veil, and, assisted by her father, threw the heavy fur coat over a chair. Sir Anthony made his way quickly to a large canopied hearth where a log fire was sending out its grateful heat, casting shadows over the smooth stone floor and the heavy dark furniture.

"And the guide is right, ma'mselle," answered Father Felix. To be lost on the mountain in a snow-storm means only one thing—death."

"But it isn't falling fast now," she protested, "and surely the path is plain enough to see."

"Ah," answered the Father, "it is going to fall very heavily in a little moment, and the path will be blotted out. Many have perished in the snow within but a few feet of the Post road even, not knowing how near at hand help was. Mademoiselle should thank the Bon Dieu who has permitted her to reach the Hospice before the storm has set in."

She was looking out through the window as the snow flakes commenced to descend rapidly. It was getting dark outside, but she was warm where she was. However simple and elementary was the furnishing of their shelter with its mediæval appearance and its scrupulous cleanness, perhaps she was not feeling sorry that a refuge from the bitter weather outside was available.

"Indeed, I am thankful," she replied, as the wind began to howl and the snow to come down in quicker and heavier layers. "But my father has been ill," she explained, "and I was anxious to get him into Switzerland without delay. I wish now that we had taken the direct route by train and tunnel; but I thought that the journey over the mountains with the grandeur of the scenery and the purity of the bracing air might benefit him and distract his mind from brooding and dwelling on—what has caused his illness. I always imagined that by the end of March there was but little danger."

"March is an uncertain month," replied Father Felix. "Sometimes on the Alps Spring comes ahead of its time, sometimes it is late. Yesterday and this morning it was fine, beautiful, but now"—he peered through the old-fashioned window—"look you. It is indeed well that monsieur has not been exposed to its full severity."

"Already I fear he has felt it terribly," she said in a low voice. "Oh, how I blame myself for having come this way." Then with wrinkled brow and slow step she walked over to the open fireplace where Sir Anthony was warming himself. "Are you frozen?" she asked jokingly, as if to cheer the old man.

"No, child," he answered, his voice weak and sad, for he had been a different man since that terrible night on Tower Wharf. As a young man

he was one of the smartest and most athletic of Guardsmen. Middle-age had brought him none of the regrets which wilder and more profligate natures had cause to suffer from. Even up till now a healthy constitution and a knowledge of how to keep fit had preserved a sane mind in a healthy body. But complete freedom from illness or worry had been the worst preparation for when the time came for the enduring of a terrible and cruel shock. The weak and ailing live on, because they are so near to death that Fate deems it scarcely worth while to demand its predestined own. It is the strong and able that go suddenly and quickly. And so it was with Sir Anthony. The physical power to rise superior to the swift and heavy blow was not forthcoming, Italy had interested him only in half-measure, and so by easy stages it was decided to find their way back to England with the return of Spring. Sir Anthony had a premonition that the release which Nature gives in the end to all creatures was at hand, and he dreaded lest his last breath should be expended in a strange land. "It isn't the cold," he explained to his daughter, "for I've faced far worse than this when campaigning: then," he sighed, "the heart was warm within and hope was young, but now. . . ."

He made a gesture as of utter despair. Dorothy, too, was anything but happy, yet,

"Don't fret, Dad," she cheered, laying her

warm arm around her father's neck. "Now you know, Dad—you promised," she teased. "Why, the very sight of a fire once more is enough to make one feel cheerful, after that everlasting stove."

"Mademoiselle has reason," put in Father Felix, as he advanced across the floor. "That hearth is one of our sights: the Hospice dates from the fourteenth century." He fingered the carving slowly and showed the date engraved at the top. "All the other rooms have stoves in them, but our abbots have taken a pride in this and kept it unaltered."

"I don't wonder—it's splendid," was Dorothy's comment. Then walking back again to the window, to the place where her thoughts most naturally reverted, "you were right, Father," she explained, "the snow is coming down worse than ever. . . . How long do you think it will last?"

"Ah," laughed the other as he tugged at his white beard, "one can never tell. Sometimes it may cease in a few hours, or it may last for days."

"For days, dad, do you hear," she called across to Sir Anthony.

"I hear, Dorry, I hear," answered the weak voice. "But does it matter: does anything matter much?" he asked plaintively. She went back to him and taking his thin, bony hand into hers, stooped low over his chair, kissed him and then sat down on the floor beside him.

"What if we are prisoners here until the storm stops?" she asked.

"I fear Mademoiselle must resign herself to that—if the worst should happen. Even if you and Monsieur were prepared to face the weather you would not be able to procure either guide or horses just yet."

A distant melody, simple and stately, soft and sad, broke on their ears as the Father explained that the music came from the brothers in the chapel through the door, chanting the Vespers of the Annunciation. The half light in the room, the crackling of the burning logs, the deathly silence outside in the snow, and the rich, strong voices of the monks singing to the swelling notes of the organ made an effect on the girl's emotions at such a time both strange and profound.

"Ave, maris stella,
Dei Mater alma,
Atque semper virgo,
Felix coeli porta."

Then a pause between the stanzas and only the sound of the wind tearing through the branches of the pine trees already creaking from the ponderous weight of snow that they were bearing. Again the plain-chant rose and fell, again the mellow notes of the organ and voices.

"Solve vincla reis:
Profer lumen caecis:
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce."

She sat with her hands joined together below the

knees and gazed far into vacancy in the midst of the burning embers, as Father Felix stood in the background and the flames cast weird shadows on his white habit. The glow of the warm fire and the consoling sweet melody transported her to some never-never land. She thought of many things as they suggested themselves to her in the curious shapes which the fire took on. A cadence from the chapel and she was thinking of Dudley: a spark from the fire and Nigel was in her heart and mind. A gradual sinking of the fire with the dimming of the music and she looked up anxiously at her father. The music ended and another log was thrown into the burning mass.

"Do you often have English people staying here?" she asked at length, but less with a desire for information than to break the monotony of waiting.

"Oh, yes, sometimes," answered the Father. "Even now there is another guest here whom the snow is detaining."

"Another guest?" she exclaimed in surprise. "An Englishman?"

Father Felix nodded his head.

"Daddy," she almost shouted in her excitement, "we've a companion in misfortune—another weather-bound traveller." But the girl had not noticed that Sir Anthony, comforted by the warmth of the fire, was dozing.

"Monsieur is worn out with the journey and

the cold," suggested the monk. "If I might advise," he said, "had he not better go and rest? Let me ring for the lay brother."

Dorothy assented gladly. Then going nearer to the old soldier on her knees, and laying her hands on the rug that had been drawn round him, "Daddy, dear," she said softly, "I want you to go and lie down for a time. You're tired and the rest will do you good." He opened his eyes slowly. "Just to please me," she begged, "will you?"

The old man hesitated for a moment, then rising slowly to his feet, "Yes, dear child," he consented, "I think I will, I feel *so* tired," and stopped to suppress a yawn.

A lay brother entered and bowed to Sir Anthony.

"Take monsieur to his room," said Father Felix, "and see that he has all that he needs."

Half-supporting, half-embracing her father Dorothy advanced as far as the door which opened out into a corridor. There, handing over her charge to the lay brother, she wished him good-night and sought again the fireside. Father Felix was touched by the filial affection exhibited by the English girl. His own father had died when he was quite young, he explained, and his mother had with the scantiest of means brought him and his two brothers up without help from relations or friends. Dorothy made him tell her the whole story from his childhood days until the

present, how that he was descended from one of the old aristocratic French families who lost life and land and château during the Revolution. His father and mother had left the south of France soon after their marriage and settled down in Lucerne, where both lay buried. One of his brothers was a sailor in the French Navy, the other was in a bank at Tunis. But he had not seen either for years. Asked as to what induced him to undertake the Religious life he explained that as a boy he always felt the spell of the Monastic vocation, but that on the death of his mother when he was still a young man he had set out one day to migrate across the mountains to Italy there to settle down in a new career. But on the way, staying a night at the Hospice the vision of St. Bernard had appeared to him, and he was impelled by the desire to remain. The next morning he had informed the Abbot, and after a full novitiate he had in time been fully professed.

She listened intently, impressed with his simple narrative. It was passing strange to hear so interesting a life-story under such an historic roof, in so high and obscure a corner of the world. Then feeling he had spoken more about himself than he had wished,

"Your father has been very ill?" the monk enquired, seeking an opportunity of changing the subject.

"Yes, indeed; and yet," she added, "I think

his health would mend if only his mind could be at rest." But that, she emphasised, "could only happen by a miracle."

"Faith can and does work miracles," answered the Father. "It was a miracle that led me to live here in the Hospice of St. Bernard. My child, never lose faith. We are in God's hands."

"I will not," she promised, as she lowered her head, and hid her face.

There was a sudden metallic click as the latch of the door into the chapel was raised, and a middle-aged man with grey hair and a serious face entered.

"This is our other guest," introduced Father Felix, "of whom I spoke just now."

The grey-haired man bowed. She could see in a moment that he was English. "I hear we are fellow prisoners," she smiled.

"I was on my way across the mountains to Italy. I wanted to make some studies of the mountains before the snow begins to melt. Fortunately I am not pressed for time," he said.

"I only wish that we could say the same," she remarked. "We are going in the opposite way to yours—to the Swiss Lakes. I had hoped to have reached the foot of the Pass to-night, but the guides refused to go on, and the Father tells me that the journey would be one of real danger."

"Danger, indeed," he exclaimed. "I have stayed here before, and Father Felix can tell you, as I can, that in the Pass, in just such a storm

as this, many have met not only danger but death itself."

"Monsieur is right," corroborated Father Felix. "Always upon the morrow of such a night as this we search the Pass and find too often those to whom we can give but one last sad rite of refuge among the eternal snows. We pray when the storm sweeps down for the living that they may be saved from the perils of the mountains; for the dead," he added, lowering his voice "that they may have rest and peace." Then turning to the other man, "My son," he asked, "will you come with me to the chapel?" Then to the girl, "Mam'selle will forgive my leaving her? Should you need anything," he observed, "that bell will summon the lay brother."

They bowed deferentially to the girl and withdrew into the chapel.

Left to herself and her thoughts once more Dorothy Gore drew the big oak chair closer to the fire. She picked up another log and threw it into the burning mass. "What a night," she thought as she shivered, to be lost in the deadly embrace of the cruel snows, beyond the help of any fellow-beings, with no one to hear the piteous cries, but all the time sinking lower and faster down the side of the mountain. She rose from her chair impatient, fidgety, restless, and walked across to the window once more, but the snow was still falling and blocking up the panes. Perhaps somewhere along the Alps a poor wretched

traveller was battling with the storm, unable to make headway, his strength failing him as he yielded to the overpowering forces. It was horrible—unthinkable. With a shudder she withdrew, and kneeling at a prie-Dieu, above which a tiny oil-lamp burned its veneration to the image of St. Bernard, she prayed for those who should be wandering across the mountains that night. Then with a long, deep yawn, she settled herself down in an alcove by the side of the fireplace, and wrapping a rug around her shoulders, closed her eyes as the fire-light died down. In less than a minute she was asleep in sheer exhaustion through the excitement of the day and the biting wind that had blown on her face ever since they had set out in the early morning.

* * * * * * * *

How long she had slept she did not know, but she was roused to sudden consciousness again by her own scream, at the sound of which strange noise Father Felix came running through the doorway.

"But what ails you, Mam'selle?" he asked in awe. She was barely awake and rubbed her eyes in stupid wonder. Then coming to her senses again, "I fell asleep," she said, "I saw in a dream—I heard the voice of one who is the dearest in the world to me, calling for help. Oh Father, it was real, it was terrible. I believe in dreams—surely you do. The night before my brother died I had a warning like this, yet I

heeded it not and allowed it to be forgotten. But now," she insisted, drawing her hand across her forehead, "I shall be warned; someone is wanting help, I've heard the cry, I must go."

Father Felix was perplexed. "But whither?" he asked. "The snow is blinding; you couldn't walk a dozen yards."

"What's that?" she asked excitedly, as a sound of sleigh bells was heard outside. There were voices, too, and she could imagine the horses shaking themselves as the bells jingled again.

"That is the sleigh—the Express Post," replied Father Felix as he could just see through one narrow corner of the window. "It goes through everything—fair weather and foul; duty must face death, but even they cannot get much further until the storm abates.

"But I must go; they will have to take me with them," she insisted.

The good-hearted monk hesitated for a time, and wondered if the cold and hardships of travelling had upset the Englishwoman's mental balance. "My child," he protested, "you do not realise the risk."

"While Nigel is in danger," she went on, "perhaps dying, I cannot stay here in comfort and warmth. No, I cannot wait; I will not. Let me go and see for myself. What are dreams sent for but to guide us? You will help me, Father, you will—I beseech you?"

The old man believed that she was sane now,

yet his hands were tied. "It is beyond my power," he replied. "Indeed, mam'selle, there is nothing to do but to wait; all else would be madness for the present." She took a step over towards the door and was about to go out and negotiate with the driver of the Express, when the door was thrown open and Lord Adolphus entered.

"Miss Gore," he said, stepping back in surprise, "I came here to meet Nigel."

"Nigel?" she asked, wondering what the man could mean.

"Yes; he's here is he not?"

She shook her head.

"But I wired him from Serrano," said Lord Adolphus, removing his heavy gloves and edging nearer the fire. He shook the snow off his clothes into the hearth and endeavoured to warm the palms of his hands. "I wired him to meet me here. He was to have come up by the Pass; it is strange that he is not here."

Dorothy could not speak; she only thought and wondered that some people could scoff at dreams. But Father Felix spoke for her.

"To come up the Pass—through a storm like this," he observed, "is well-nigh impossible. No one could face it. Your friend would never have started, or at least he would soon have put back."

"Such a message as mine," remarked Lord Adolphus, warming his back by the fire, "would,

I think, have brought him to face anything. He would have set his mind to risk a good deal before giving in."

"I knew it; I saw it in my dream," was Dorothy's comment. "My mother was the seventh child of a seventh child. I remember she had almost second sight, and sometimes I believe it is hereditary. Nigel started on his way; of that I am convinced," she stated firmly, biting her lips. "He must have got a long way on his road by now—perhaps not far from where this Hospice stands. Out of that vast waste of snow he is calling for help with no one to answer that cry. At all costs I will not let him call in vain as long as there is someone in the world to go to his aid. *Please* give me all the assistance that you can," she pleaded. Then picking up her heavy fur coat and adjusting her hat and veil, "Come, Dolly," she begged, as she buttoned up her coat. "You'll take me with you; you won't disappoint me?"

And in spite of the entreaties of the good Father and of the protests from Lord Adolphus himself, the two led the way out to where the sleigh was standing and the horses were steaming after the rapid passage down the crest of the mountain. The driver at first declined to take a lady, but Lord Adolphus, partly by the geniality of his speech and the encouragement of some money, succeeded at last in overcoming any objections. Food was brought out for the journey

before the sleigh was allowed to leave the Hospice, and to the jingling of the bells, and the barking of the dogs disturbed by the sounds, the driver whipped up his horses and the sleigh swerved round and up the narrow path on to the road above. The night was not clear, but the powerful lamps of the sleigh cast a light some distance ahead.

The sleigh sped on, cutting its silent way through the snowy night.

CHAPTER XIV

The old-fashioned diligence with Father Victor, Nigel and Jim Callender was not long in reaching the outskirts of the town, and in a very short time Lucerne and the minarets of its cathedral were many hundreds of feet below them.

Father Victor spoke no English, and Callender had neither French nor German, so that the conversation revolved round Nigel as its pivot. He exchanged a few pleasantries with the venerable priest, but the latter seemed to prefer his own thoughts to conversing with the Englishman. Callender's talk was both dull and banal, and consisted chiefly in singling out horses likely to distinguish themselves during the flat racing season and the probable winner of the Derby. As they ascended higher and higher into the pure, clear mountain air, among the stately massive pines, with here and there a narrow cloud of blue smoke rising up from the roof of a picturesque châlet, neither the natural beauty of the scenery nor the exhilaration of the sharp atmosphere seemed to affect him in even the

smallest degree. For the most part he sat glum and speechless. Once he had drawn from his pocket a pack of soiled cards, but Nigel had politely declined to play. Cigarette after cigarette was lighted, but he seemed to derive no real pleasure from smoking. Now and again he would shift his position wearily and express a forcible remark regarding the tedium of the journey and the slowness of the diligence. Whenever the conveyance heeled over heavily into a deep rut, so that the primitive springs scarcely compensated for the jolt, he exhibited a look of unalloyed annoyance, unrestrained and brutal.

The afternoon ended and the evening came with a cruel sickly sunset. They were still a little distance from the Hospice, but the first stopping-place had been reached and Father Victor had descended at the little châlet and the journey had then been resumed again. As the sun went down a wild black cloud came up, and the driver for safety's sake lessened the speed of his horses and felt his way through the snow-drift with caution. Down in the valley below the faint tinkling of the cow bells and the complainings of the cattle could be heard: otherwise everything was as still death, as impenetrable as mystery. More than once the driver had told Nigel that he doubted whether they would be able to progress much further, but each time he had been encouraged and exhorted to continue.

The horses were becoming fatigued and the driver himself could hardly endure the perishing cold, which in spite of his thick protection could not be prevented from chilling his very bones. They came on slowly but gradually and reached a small hollow in the Pass where the snow had made a deep drift. In vain the horses were lashed and coaxed, but the coach would not move another inch further forward. The driver was in despair : Callender was freely scattering his oaths and his unrestrained opinions of the country and its people. By means of a couple of shovels carried under the driver's box a cutting was cleared at the end of half an hour's laborious digging, when the dark cloud came over them and a heavy snow storm burst suddenly over them. No sooner had this happened than a sound of bells came jingling round from somewhere above them and before they had had time to realise their position one of the Post Express sleighs dashed round the corner, caught the diligence a glancing blow and after swerving dangerously near the edge of the white glistening precipice continued on its way. Someone shouted from the back, but without stopping it sped on its way. Nigel and Callender working away with their shovels as much for the sake of generating warmth to their chilled bodies as to enable the little hill to be surmounted had been able to stand back just in time as the lights of the sleigh swung into sight. They called out to the driver of the diligence still

sitting on his box, but the cry did not reach him in time, and the pace at which the sleigh was travelling had been so great that the side-blow directed against the coach was sufficient to turn the latter immediately on to its side, so that coach, driver and horses for one terrible minute of suspense hung poised at the edge of a sheer precipice which rose in an unbroken line of three hundred feet from the rocks below. Nigel ran to the rescue as fast as the deep snow would allow him, followed by Callender. With a shout of encouragement he exhorted the driver to hold on, but at the very moment when they had come up to the coach, its weight slid slowly down the frozen side taking with it the unfortunate driver and one of the horses. A cry of horror came up from below as the poor man descended through the air, and the dull thud and the breaking of splinters announced the final destruction of the diligence as well. Only one horse remained. Caught with its back against a mound of hard snow it was wedged securely, and the reins snapping at the critical moment it had been prevented from joining the destruction which awaited the other animal.

Nigel never forgot that moment in after years. The feeling of utter helplessness, the ignorance of their whereabouts, the prospect of spending a bitter night on one of the coldest spots in Europe with neither food nor shelter, and the terrible sight which had without warning presented itself to

his eyes were such as almost to unhinge his mind. It was some time before either he or Callender could realize what had happened. Their first action as soon as they saw the coach and driver disappear over the white cliff was to set to work to save the remaining horse: even while this was being done and the nervous animal was struggling to his feet the men were nearly sent flying into space as the poor creature slipped and slid over the treacherous surface.

What was to be done? How far away was the Hospice? What sudden turnings did the narrow road take? The storm increased in its fury and lay thick on their heavy coats. They reasoned together and decided to push on as best they could. To remain where they were was to court certain death. Better to risk falling down the precipice than to freeze to death where they stood. So with Callender ahead, and Nigel following close behind leading the surviving horse limping still from the blow which the coach had dealt its leg, the little party trudged silently and sadly up the Pass. After half an hour's tramping they reached a place where the road ran along for a time on a level, and there they halted for an interval to rest. Everywhere was black save for the loom of the distant snowy peaks and ridges. The snow stopped falling quite so thickly. Callender was the first to break the silence.

"Nice sort of thing to call a road, Mr. Villiers, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes; pretty bad," replied the other, "but it didn't seem to stop their Post Express. I suppose those fellows could find their way about here blindfold."

"Came down the road like a toboggan, didn't it: knocked poor old Monelli's juggernaut into splinters, and settled the driver for life. They'll never see him no more in Lucerne. How's your knee feeling now?"

"Oh," answered Nigel endeavouring to forget the pain, "pretty well, thanks. Wish there was a châlet or shelter of some kind somewhere about. We must keep going, Callender," he added at length. "I mean to be at the Hospice to-night if it possibly can be done."

"Would it be any good getting on the horse?" suggested Callender.

"No: I think I'll keep going a bit longer," answered the other trying hard to be cheerful. "Besides, the poor old mare is limping badly enough as it is."

They resumed their march with slow and heavy tread, taking care to keep close to the side of the Pass away from the precipice. The snow began to fall heavily and almost as badly as before. But they were making headway and there was a bare chance of the weather improving. At the end of another mile, which had seemed like a hundred, they found themselves at the foot of a further and steeper ridge which had to be surmounted. There they halted for a second

time before toiling up a difficult and perilous path. Somehow they had missed the proper road, but the bridle-path joined it again a little further up, and it was too disheartening to retrace their steps a yard.

"Would you like a little drop of brandy?" Callender called out across the snow.

"Oh, many thanks—but I think not," came the reply.

"Wouldn't hurt you: anyway I'm going to 'ave a drop myself. 'Ere's luck," he said, as he pretended to take a deep draught from the flask. But the drink never entered his mouth. Then smacking his lips and replacing the flask inside his coat, he expressed himself ready for anything. Callender was not so mentally deficient as to be unable sometimes to act cleverly when opportunity demanded it. Then,

"Snow seems to be getting thicker," he surmised.

"Yes," assented Nigel, "and that's a double reason why we should hurry on till we get back to the road again. Gracious me," he exclaimed.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the other in surprise.

"Nothing," answered Nigel. "I was only noticing what an awful drop it is down below." For the snow seemed to be lighting up the jagged rocks beneath for several hundreds of feet.

Callender looked down, and shrunk back at the appalling sight.

"Don't look very tasty, do it, Mr. Villiers?" he agreed. "Better be careful," he shouted, "the path's very narrow, and you can't exactly tell where the snow ends and the precipice begins. What price meeting the Post Express here?" he inquired cynically. "Shouldn't stand a dog's chance—should we?"

"They wouldn't have stopped, I suppose," muttered Nigel indignantly. "They're like some of those motor people who expect to find no one else on the road. If you don't stand clear out of their way, then it's your fault and you've only got yourself to blame if you get hurt."

"Or get turned over like that old thing that Monelli put us in." They walked on again in silence, and approached the summit of the ridge.

"By the way," asked Nigel at length, "you heard them shout from the sleigh as they swept by. What was it the fellow said?"

"Couldn't quite catch," said Callender, "but I'm no scholar: I never could understand these foreigners."

"It struck me," explained Nigel, "from the little that I did hear and the way he waved his hands, that he meant there was a second sledge behind."

"That'd be orl right," thought Callender. "I'd like to see 'ow anyone else could get by here." Then having reached the main road again, "Before we go on any further," suggested

the bookmaker, " take my advice and have a drop of brandy. You needn't be frightened, Mr. Villiers: it's some of old Monelli's best."

" Well . . . perhaps I'll change my mind—thanks," said Nigel. " I'm getting pretty fed up with this," he remarked, tired and cold and enduring in his knee a ceaseless dull pain.

" Don't spare it," requested Callender as Nigel drank from the flask. " We can't be so very far from the Hospice now. Just one more dash—and through we go."

Nigel screwed on the stopper and handed the flask back again. " Thanks," he said, " thanks very much."

They tackled the steep incline with determination. Nigel stumbled and slipped, but regained his feet again in an instant.

" Better let me go first and see what the road is like," suggested Callender as he pushed his way in front. Nigel's knee was becoming increasingly painful, so Callender took upon himself the leading of the horse. " What's it like ? " called Villiers some yards behind, dragging his way along wearily.

" Not so very grand," came back the reply. " 'Tain't 'ardly a foot-path, but I can't see very far—tell you in a minute."

" Thank you," said Nigel feebly. Then stepping clumsily through the snow, he came to a sudden halt and began to sway backwards and

forwards. "I say—I say," he called across the drift with the snow up to his thighs.

"Why, what's wrong?" answered the other.

Nigel was feeling as he never remembered to have felt before. The white plain was whizzing round and round: he felt himself getting weaker and weaker, with no energy to move in any direction whatever. There was a dull, burning sensation which seemed to be consuming his inside, and then a film-like substance crept over his eyes.

"I—I don't know," he answered as he raised his hand to his forehead.

"Why—hang it, what's wrong with me? That brandy must have been deucedly strong stuff. I can hardly see . . . where are you, where are you? I say, Callender . . ."

He reeled to the side of the steep precipice, but fortunately as quickly swerved inside, or he would have followed the coach down the side. Then hesitating for a second he collapsed a helpless mass on the snow.

Callender came running down the slope.

"Steady on, now," he exclaimed, as he propped him up.

"I'm choking," remarked the young guardsman.

The bookmaker raised his back and knelt by his side, making a support with a bank of snow.

"Feel a bit giddy—don't yer? Well, you'll soon be all right. 'Ere lemme undo your coat—

you'll be all right. It's what they call mountain-sickness—that's what it is," he explained with a Satanic ability to pervert the truth. He quickly unbuttoned Nigel's coat. Then, this being done, "That's it," he added pleasantly, "now we're better—I won't leave you—you needn't be afraid of that." Upon which he proceeded to unbutton the man's inner jacket, but Nigel was not as far gone as Callender had supposed.

"What are you doing?" asked the younger man quickly, and seizing hold of his hand.

"Don't be a fool," growled the other in annoyance, "I won't 'urt yer: it's all for the best—for your own good—d'you 'ear?"

But in a flash it dawned on Nigel that treachery was at work, and that he was the victim of foul play. With all the strength that remained to him, he held on to the big hand of the bully, but he was no match, lying numbed and lame and drugged in the chilly snow. With the snarl of a wild beast threatened with the loss of its prey, Callender flung aside the hand that opposed him, tore open the inside coat and dipping his hand into the inner pocket extracted his note case. It was the work of but a few moments to search through its contents and find the bill, which he promptly transferred to his own pocket.

"You rascal—you damned thief," exclaimed Nigel, bitterly realising his inability. "Help, help," he cried.

But Callender only laughed. "Who's going to 'ear you 'ere, Mr. Villiers?" he asked maliciously. "Who's going to 'elp you now? Who d'you think's likely to find you, a night like this?" He left him behind and led the horse up the slope of the Pass. "You're going to sleep, you are—just where you lay, and the snow is going to come down proper again in another 'arf hour. You'll soon be covered up and then the Express sleigh will come down and run over you."

But he stopped speaking, and put his ear to the ground. He thought he heard something in the distance, but he was mistaken.

"Good-bye, Mr. Villiers," he shouted triumphantly. "You 'ad me turned off the course because I owed you something and I didn't pay. Well, I've owed you a bit more since then, and that's a little debt that I 'aven't forgotten. It's been chalked up in my 'ead for a long time, and now I'm going to settle both transactions in a way of my own. Unless I'm much mistaken you are going to be paid in full. . ."

What was that? There was something coming. He could hear the jingling of the bells, he could see the vague outline of the moving mass coming round the Pass, and the sickly yellow of the lamps. Good heavens they were travelling as fast as the other! Here was the Post Express which they had been warned to look out of the way of. He made a frantic

effort and gained the road, but owing to the darkness and the sudden bewildering flash of the lamps, he took a false step and instead of treading on firm snow, his foot found no rigid resting-place. Disengaging himself from the horse, the animal slid without hesitation down the snow-slide and clattered down the abyss. The weight of the moving mass imperilled Callender's position still more, and with nothing to stop him he found himself being swept over the cliff. In vain he dug his nails into the snow and frantically endeavoured to save himself: but the snow gave way and his fingers only made patterns in the soft, yielding substance. He plunged his feet into the white mass, but it was no use. He was going to his own place at last, and nothing could stand now between life and death. He called aloud to Nigel for help—the cry of one who is ready to sacrifice pride, vengeance and self-respect in the hope of saving his own body. But Nigel did not hear the first shout, so dimmed were his powers. But the second cry for help made the young man struggle to his feet, and before the shout had been uttered again, he was nearly up to the top of the slope: yet as he reached almost the edge of the cliff, the heavy weight of the Cockney slipped slowly and inevitably over the side. He listened for the ominous sound which the contact with the rocks would send up. Poor devil, he thought . . . But though he strained his ears the sound came

not. He must have fallen into a deep drift and the snow had silenced his cries—smothered the life out of him. What a death !

" Mr. Villiers, for heaven's sake save me."

It was Callender's voice. The drift had saved him, then. Lying on his chest Nigel dragged himself as near to the edge as he could without being carried over.

" Where are you ? " he cried to the Cockney.

But before the other had time to reply, a sharp and sudden crack as of the breaking of wood echoed round the rocks. He looked down to a spot twenty feet below, where a slight projection came out from the rocks, and caught sight of Callender hanging on with his two hands to the thin branch of a young tree. Unable to support the weight of the heavy man it cracked under the strain, and with a loud, piercing shriek Callender disappeared into the white abyss, carrying a shower of loose snow and stones after him. Nigel shrunk back in horror, and crawled up to the summit of the slope. He was dazed and bewildered. Then, unable to endure the tension another moment, he felt himself yielding to a faint, and without further to do flopped helpless to the ground. Sight and hearing and all his senses were dimmed or he would have noticed the Post Express a few yards away and heard the voices of several men and of one woman. They had heard the shriek of Callender, they had caught

the sound of the crackling of the tree and had leaped out of the sleigh. As they had hurried to the edge of the precipice they had stumbled across a body. Lord Adolphus was the first to recognise the form of his nephew. Holding the lamp in one hand he half raised the inert figure with his other. But Dorothy Gore quicker than thought had stooped down and supporting the younger man's head on her lap kissed his cold lips as warm tears of joy and sorrow sped down her crimson cheeks.

CHAPTER XV

LITTLE time had elapsed between the finding of Nigel and the return of the search party to the Hospice. At first thought to be lifeless, his benumbed body had been reverently and tenderly placed in the sleigh and carried back with all the speed that the horses could travel. Arrived at the Hospice the good monks had employed their experience and skill in such cases to good purpose. One of the brothers had been a doctor before taking the vows and it was fortunate for Nigel that such was the case, and that ere matters had gone too far Nigel was provided with medical attention. He had been put to bed and thanks to a good constitution had after the interval of a day regained his normal health. For the first few hours his life had seemed to hang in the balance, for the incident of the drug had not been suspected and the comatose condition in which he remained for so long differed from the manner in which the exposure to Alpine snows usually affected its victims.

Dorothy Gore had busied herself rendering what aid she could. Her first shock of grief

had given place to a feeling of intense joy that miraculously the sleigh had arrived at the spot just when her lover was most in need of assistance. For a time the suspense had been unbearable when Nigel's chance of recovery seemed doubtful. But hope fought against despair, faith against distrust, and gradually up to a certain point the patient had won back his health and strength. From that point recovery had been so rapid that only a few hours were needed to restore him to that condition which moderate habits and an active, open-air life had previously bestowed upon him. By the afternoon of the day following the incident Nigel was nearly himself, and the warmth and good food of the Hospice gave the final touches to complete the cure. Another good night's rest and he awoke before dawn and watched the sun rise majestic and glorious over the white mountains. With it vanished the deed of darkness and with it, too, came back the confidence and expectation of better things to come. He had dressed and found his way outside, and looked down to survey the panoramic view over the mountains. Everywhere was pure white stillness, broken faintly in the distance by a tinkling of the cowbells and the calling of a peasant. The storm had passed, the sky was without a cloud, the air all crisp and clear. He had wandered back to the Hospice as the strains of the organ music and voices were wafted out

from the chapel where the monks were assembled for their morning office. Higher and higher rose the sun. Warmer and warmer grew the atmosphere. Spring was hurrying on apace now that the storm had done its worst and passed on.

As he entered the Hospice again, he found Father Felix walking slowly up and down the floor and Dorothy gazing out of one of the windows. The instant Nigel closed the door she had rushed towards him and welcomed him in a passionate embrace, heedless of the presence of the Religious.

"You down already, Dorry?" remarked the young man as he kissed her delicate mouth.

She mildly rebuked him for approaching so near to death's door, but the young man laughed.

"Anyway," he answered, "I'm well away from it this morning." (The sun poured in through the windows and flooded the room with bright gleams). "Only a bit slack," he added, "otherwise I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"Then," put in Father Felix, "Monsieur should be doubly thankful, for I know that he has escaped a double danger."

Nigel looked up in surprise. "A double danger? Why, what . . ."

"The deadly peril of the storm, the deadlier wickedness of the assassin."

Dorothy looked at Nigel, but Nigel was looking seriously at Father Felix. "Assassin?" they both muttered.

"Yes—it is true," answered the monk. "The man who was with you—he was your enemy."

But the Englishman only smiled as he thought of the grim incident.

"Poor beggar," he began, "poor Callender," as he sat down by the side of Dorothy. "I can see him now—clinging frantically to the edge, praying, promising, cursing . . . and then falling . . . But I ought not to laugh; it was really too awful."

"We found this flagon beside you," said the Father, as he took a flask from the mantelpiece. The leather had suffered by exposure and the silver was dulled with the melting snow. "Does it belong to monsieur: did you drink from it?"

Nigel rose to his feet and examined it carefully. "Yes," he affirmed at length, "I'm sure I did."

Father Felix folded his arms. There was a look of gravity on his face.

"That brandy," said he, "was drugged." His eyes opened wide as he spoke. "One of our lay brothers who went to search at the corner of the Pass where you were found suspected its perfume. He has some knowledge as a chemist, monsieur, and tested it . . . It contained morphia."

"Morphia?" asked Nigel. "Are you sure? But why—why should he . . .?"

"Tell me this, monsieur. That man was your enemy?"

"I believe so now," answered Nigel, "but I did not suppose . . ."

"He might have meant to rob you," suggested Miss Gore.

"Matter of fact," said Nigel, "that's exactly what he intended. He *did* rob me." Then, with a start, "I had in my pocket a paper," he observed.

"What was that paper?" asked the girl eagerly.

"It was a . . . a forgery . . . a clue to . . ."

"To the forger," suggested the Father.

"Not that," corrected Nigel, "but to his accomplice."

"And could this man have been the accomplice?" demanded Dorothy.

"Yes," replied Nigel, with sudden conviction. "But if he meant to murder me, why didn't he finish his work?"

"There was no need," explained the monk. "He had but to drug and leave you: the snow would do the rest."

"Yes, yes," remarked Dorothy thoughtfully, "I understand it all now. That was the danger that I saw."

"You saw, Dorry; where did you see it?"

"Well, you may laugh; but I saw it in this very room. I fell asleep by the warm fire, and it all came to me in a dream. I saw you in the falling snow, I saw you dying; you called to me by name, you were calling for help." Nigel looked at her intently. "That was what made me seek you; that was what drew me on in spite of everything. Isn't it wonderful, Nigel,

isn't it strange that you should have seemed to have called to me from the depths of snow and despair, and that I should hear you?"

The tears welled to her eyes as she thought gratefully of the happy results.

"That," said the monk solemnly, "is one of the deeper things of life at which men mock. They deny so much, they believe so little. They would have us believe that the Saints cannot hear our prayers, and that even the cry of one soul in distress to another is unperceived, and yet did not Sir Anthony tell me yesterday that now one can send a telegram across Europe without wires?"

"Yes," replied Nigel, "and be answered. It is undeniable; you'll be having it up here," he added smilingly, "soon." Then turning to the girl, the picture of youth and beauty as the sun glistened on the rich glossy hair and lit up her face, "Dorry," he said, "it was you who saved me from the death that this blackguard had meant for me—that is if he really intended murder."

"What he meant," put in the Father, "we shall soon know. If that paper he stole from you be on him, you will find it. The brothers, whose duty it is to bring in the dead, are searching for his body on the mountain; they will bring it in here if it is possible to be found."

He had reached the end of the room, and bowing to Dorothy and Nigel he opened the door. But as he did so someone was entering

from the other side: he drew back to let the other in and went out.

"Good morning," greeted Lord Adolphus cheerily. "My dear Nigel, I'm delighted to see you looking yourself again. But I was afraid"—this as he turned to address Miss Gore—"that he was in for a pretty bad time of it."

Nigel smiled. "Perhaps if it hadn't been for you and Dorry coming to my aid just when you did—well," he shrugged his shoulders, "it might have been more than I could endure. Why, here's Sir Anthony," he added as he turned round.

"How do you do, sir?" he asked, as he took the thin, limpid hand. It was piteous to see the frail old man, without a suspicion of gaiety or brightness in his countenance.

"I'm better in health, thank you, Nigel," he answered, as he accepted the young man's arm and seated himself in an alcove. "Still we haven't the right to expect to be feeling particularly cheerful at my time of life, when there is so much in the air to worry and harass one."

Nigel was moved to compassion at the change which time had wrought in the fine old General.

"I think, Sir Anthony," he ventured, "that you take too gloomy a view of the matter. No one blames you; the whole world knows perfectly well that your own honour and reputation are as untarnished as at any time of your life. At least, sir, you will allow me to say that the regiment . . ."

Sir Anthony raised his hand in protest. He knew his own mind, and his nature was of the kind that suffered its joys and sorrows alone.

"I blame myself," he insisted, "and a man can't get away from that. I had a trust to guard, and that trust was betrayed by me or mine. If I could replace what was lost, only then should I be able to hold up my head again and look every honest man in the face."

"'The immediate jewel,' you see," whispered Dorothy, as she pressed Nigel's arm, "for you, for all of us, in every sense."

Lord Adolphus linked his arm in Nigel's, and walked over to the window away from the door. Then leaning on his elbow, looking out on to the glistening snows, "Now, my dear Nigel," he began, "that we are able to speak as we could not on that night—you got my telegram, by the way?"

"From Serrano? Of course; it was that which brought me up the Pass by the quickest, or rather the only, thing that could travel. Tell me," he asked, "why was it you were so anxious that I should meet you at the Hospice?"

"Because," answered the other, "I had at length traced the man for whom we have all been searching so long; because I have reason to believe that Julian Merrowdale was and is here."

"Here?" asked Nigel, in surprise. "Do you mean here, in this Hospice?"

"I am Julian Merrowdale," said a voice immediately behind them, for the door had

opened quietly and the man had entered unperceived.

"At last," thought Nigel to himself. He turned round and faced the stranger.

"What do you want with me?" asked the latter, "and pardon me, whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My father," said Nigel, "was Alaric Villiers."

"Of course, of course. I remember perfectly," he went on enthusiastically. "Forgive me for not recognising you at first. I can never forget your goodness and courage last summer." And he held out his hand and grasped the young man's eagerly.

But Nigel drew back. "I think you forget," he observed coolly, "that my mother is Lady Margaret . . . Constable." He winced as he pronounced the last word.

"Constable? What do you mean?" But Nigel turned half away, and avoided the question.

"Mr. Merrowdale," observed Lord Adolphus, "is it possible that you haven't seen our advertisements addressed to you in the *Times* and *Morning Post*—in fact, in every English paper?"

"I've seen no English news for months," answered Merrowdale, placing his hands behind him. "But," he continued, as he turned to Nigel, "before I left England I understood that you had become Lord Deerminster."

"A good deal, sir, has happened since then. My uncle," he said, with a wave of the hand, "Lord Adolphus. . . ."

"Yes, I remember you now," observed Merrowdale.

"Has succeeded to the title," concluded Nigel.

"Why—what do you mean?" queried the other in surprise.

"The English law refuses to recognise my father, Lord Alaric's, divorce from his first wife—from—" But Nigel hesitated.

"From my wife," put in Merrowdale firmly, but he added, "in the sight of heaven. You mean, I presume, Sylvia Thorne."

Nigel assented.

"But surely," explained Julian, "death is a divorce which all laws must recognise."

"That is exactly the point," argued Lord Adolphus. "We are anxious to know—forgive me, but when exactly did Sylvia Thorne die, for all traces seem to have disappeared? We have had searches made in the registers in Switzerland and England, but with the same result. No one can tell us if she is living or dead, nor—if she died—when she died."

Merrowdale put his hands deep into his pockets.

"*I* know," he said quietly.

"But will you speak what you know?" asked Nigel, as he waited anxiously for the answer.

"I *will* speak," said Merrowdale decisively, "and what is more the dead shall speak too, in order to do right for the living."

They sat down, and presently Dorothy came across and joined them. "She died upon the

mountains here," continued Merrowdale sadly, "and in just such a storm as that of the night before last. And here close by the Hospice we laid her to sleep on"

"Do you mean," asked Lord Adolphus, "that her grave is here?"

"No," answered Merrowdale, "not a grave, but a resting place, of which the intense cold keeps all committed to it unchanging and unchanged. So here, year by year, thanks to the kindness of the monks, I come to look once more on the face of my beloved, untouched by time, undesecrated by decay." There was a deep reverence in his voice as he spoke of the woman who in life had exercised so great a spell over the man. "I hope one day, perhaps now not so far off, to come for the last time and lay me down beside her for the last time." Dorothy sat intent, regarding the man and moved by the respect which he bore to the dead. "I loved her dearly," he added; "to me she was the one woman in the world. As such I loved her, as such I reverenced her; as such I mourn her."

There was silence for a while—a sympathetic silence for the feelings of the man and his recollections.

Merrowdale himself was the first to break the stillness.

"What was the date of your mother's marriage?" he asked at length.

"October 1885," answered Nigel.

"And I lost Sylvia just about two years before—in the same month: and here in the Monastery books is the record of it." Then turning to Lord Adolphus, "You knew her," he said, "you knew her face, and you will be able to recognise her still." Then seeing how deep an impression his announcement had made on his hearers, "From my heart I am glad to be the means of setting right the wrong," he said.

Nigel, scarcely able to subdue the feeling of intense emotion, got up and grasped Merrowdale's two hands. "For my mother, for myself I offer you my heartfelt thanks."

"Mine, too," added Lord Adolphus. "You have lifted from me the burden of a title that I have always hated, of a position that I felt was stolen. I was never so glad of anything in my life," he remarked gaily, "as I am to be my old self again." Then placing his hand on Nigel's shoulder, "Nigel, my dear boy," he began, "no, not Nigel now, let me be the first to give you back the name that I robbed you of . . . You are Deerminster again to-day, nor had the title ever a better upholder nor the House a better head." Then becoming more excited, "And now the very first thing to do is to send a wire with the good news to your mother."

Nigel assented with enthusiasm. "How shall we word it?" he asked.

"The briefer the better," suggested his uncle, "just the news and the bare facts. Simply say,

'Merrowdale found—coming home at once—she died October 1883.' How will that do?" he asked. Nigel agreed. "Then I'll go at once to ask Father Felix how we can best get it sent off from here. Perhaps the Post Express will take it down to Lucerne to-day." He advanced to the door, but halted on the threshold. "How I should love to see Margaret's face when she reads it: how I shall love to welcome her and you back to the old place once more. My word, Nigel, there'll be a good many to cheer you on the day when you come into your own again, but no one will do it with a better heart or with greater zest than I." He opened the door and went out.

Sir Anthony had listened intently to the conversation that had been going on. "I'm sure, Nigel," he said kindly as he came across to the young man, "you need no words from me to say how glad I am that you and your mother have been vindicated. I offer you my congratulations, my boy," he said feelingly, as he took the young man's hand, "although"—he paused —"I realise that it won't be long before you take the last ray out of my life. Still, I know that you and Dorry will be happy—I am quite sure of that."

Nigel made a suitable reply and expressed a desire that time would with kindly hand soften the grief and vindicate him also. But Sir Anthony shook his head sorrowfully. "I can

never go back into the world under the cloud that rests upon my poor boy's honour, upon my own," he remarked. "You spoke just now of a good name—of 'the immediate jewel'—indeed mine is bound up with that which is lost, and, as each day makes me doubly sure, irretrievably."

Father Felix had entered quietly. "Which of us," he asked, "can say as much as that? As long as there's a Heaven there's always hope."

But while he spoke a sad dirge rose from out the monastery, the solemn male voices which seemed to keep time with an unseen tread, coming up the mountain, every moment becoming louder and clearer. As the hearers listened a vague fear fell upon them. Had some fresh victim been sacrified at the demands of the treacherous mountain? The colour fled from Dorothy's cheeks at the full realisation of all that that sound signified. Lord Adolphus and Nigel looked at each other, and then at the monk.

"What's that?" they asked almost simultaneously.

"The brothers have been on the mountain side and are bringing in the dead—ah, here they come," he said, as the door opened and four lay brothers with slow and reverent tread entered bearing a bier whose burden a heavy dark pall concealed. They carried it nearly to the door of the chapel and set it down gently and halted, as Sir Anthony and the others stood on one side

in respectful salutation. Father Felix said something to one of the brothers, and approaching the bier turned back a corner of the pall. Then beckoning with his finger to Nigel,

"Does Monsieur identify this body as that of the man who was with him the night before last?"

Nigel looked and drew back. "Yes," he said, "that is Callender." But before the Father had replaced the pall, Nigel took Miss Gore by the hand and approached the bier again. She shrunk back in horror, but Nigel insisted kindly. "Yes—yes," he begged, "I have a reason." Then nervous and frightened at the uncanny sight she looked quickly and withdrew with a cry. "What is it, Dorry," asked her lover.

"It's the face of the man who was with Dudley that night at the Tower."

"Are you sure?" he asked again.

"Absolutely—beyond a doubt," came the firm response. "I could never forget it—never, neither in life nor in death."

Father Felix glanced again at the dead man. Then, as if with a sudden thought, "Monsieur," he said calmly, "will you see if that which was stolen from you is on the body?" But Nigel hesitated.

"It is your right," persuaded the Father, "there is a duty to the living as well as to the dead."

So Nigel approached the bier a second time.

He stooped down and drew back the coat from the breast, where little lumps of snow were still clinging. He could see the bulging pocket and put his hand inside, but involuntarily a shudder ran through his own body as his hand came in contact with the lifeless form of the man who had sought to take a life but instead had forfeited his own. "There's something here," he remarked presently as the others gazed in silence. "Yes—it's a packet." He withdrew his hand and brought out a small package. Then undoing it, "Why here's the bill," he observed, "but there seems to be something else . . . I think it is . . ."

Sir Anthony came up to him and stood behind.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

Nigel walked away from the bier as the pall was replaced. There was something in his hand which caught the rays of the sun and flashed magnificently. "This, sir, is what you wanted," he remarked as the great diamond was placed in the old man's hand. "Thus to you and to us the dead hand gives back honour, happiness, and good name. See," he said, holding it up once more to sparkle in the new morning light, "see, the immediate jewel."

The brothers lifted up their burden again and passed into the chapel.

CHAPTER XVI

SPRING was early in England. The winter had been a comparatively mild one and its cruellest force had been spent before January was ended. March had forgotten to come in like a lion but nevertheless had gone out like a lamb; and so at last April had come with the first real glints of sunshine and the returning of the longer days and warmer nights.

In London the crocuses and daffodils were giving place to later flowers. People were coming back to town; the big, stucco-coated houses of Belgravia and Mayfair were receiving a new coat of paint, and there was a general endeavour to respond to the call of new life which the Sun restored. At Deerminster the primroses and hart's-tongue ferns lined the peaceful lanes, the buds burst forth from every tree, while high above the birds sang merrily. At the Chase the famous Deerminster orchids were at their best, thanks to the painstaking skill of the head gardener and his assistants, while immediately opposite the big steps of the house a couple of

round beds of deep red tulips stood out boldly against the dark earth. The house had continued to be occupied all through the winter and spring by Bess and her mother, who, to relieve the monotony of their own society, had entertained the most ill-assorted of week-end house-parties that ever desecrated an historic mansion. No one, of course, ever called now, and Deerminster which for so many generations had been regarded with a respect almost bordering on reverence was now the laughing-stock of the whole county. Not that it worried either Bess or her mother particularly: they were susceptible neither to the more delicate courtesies of life nor conscious of their absence. To be in a position that enabled them to give commands to those of their own original station was happiness in itself. Lord Adolphus had been abroad all the winter and spring, and Deerminster had known no ruler except Bess and her lieutenant, Mrs. Bissett. Friction they had between themselves and the servants, and the smooth running of the domestic business of the Chase, which had existed for scores of years in unbroken continuity, was entirely absent. There was a feeling of dissatisfaction in the air, which bordered on to actual revolution. The old order of things had changed, the new had been introduced without the smallest regard for precedent and was received with as little popularity.

Monday morning in the middle of April found

Bess in the portrait gallery of the Chase, a fine long room which had been added to the main building by one of the former marquisses. There were treasures of more than ordinary value, besides commemorating the previous representatives of the Villiers family. A deliciously calm Vandyk, a couple of Reynolds, a Romney, three Gainsboroughs and a more modern Watts were among the treasures. But to Bess they conveyed neither æsthetic pleasure nor suggested the duty of preserving the high traditions of a distinguished and illustrious family. There they hung, and performed a useful office in covering the lofty walls; otherwise they stood for no symbolical reason. A set of highly coloured, sentimental prints would have served the purpose quite as well and with less anxiety to all concerned.

The week-end party had almost ended, and only one of the brothers Sims and a Miss Mabelle Marchmont, one of the Rosebuds and niece of the "musical knockabout," had still to bid farewell and be driven off to the station. An engagement at an East-end theatre of varieties necessitated their presence in town that evening.

Bess was standing by the fine old fireplace, with its heavy overmantel and its exquisite iron work. Mr. Sims senior was wandering up and down the room until such time as his niece should come downstairs. He examined the portraits one by one in much the same patronising manner that a farmer would regard a prize pig.

"It's a proper gallery," was Mr. Sims' comment, "knights and warriors and ladies that have just hung here for centuries."

Bess was in a bad temper this morning. "Yes," she answered, "staring and staring for hundreds of years. Oh, I call it worse than nonsense; it's horrible. I daren't walk through the blessed place 'cept in daytime. It's rotten to be left here alone." She gave the coal box a vicious little kick and turned round.

"Well, well," said Mr. Sims. "You can't have everything. Besides there'll be visitors calling . . . ."

"I *don't* think," said Bess, who was beginning to see the disadvantages of a gilded cage.

Mr. Sims was about to proffer another remark, when the door opened and Dorman announced that the cab was at the door.

She glared with displeasure at the impassive butler. "The *cab?*" she asked, as if the mere sound of the word was new to her.

"Yes, my lady," responded the man, a monument of dignity and restraint, "the station fly."

"But didn't I say as Williams was to come round with the dogcart?" squeaked the nasal little Cockney.

Dorman drew himself up and squared his shoulders.

"Williams have given notice, my lady," he answered with one hand still on the door-knob. "He wishes to go at once," added the man.

"Well, he can't; it ain't legal," contradicted Bess, breathing defiance. "I ordered the dogcart and I'm going to have it. If Williams won't drive, what's Martin doing?"

Dorman moved his weight from one leg to the other.

"Beg pardon, my lady," he remarked, "but Martin is unwell with a bilious headache."

"Drunk you mean," summed up Bess.

"Oh, get out," she ordered, losing control of her temper. The butler obeyed, but as he was in the act of pulling the door to, Miss Mabelle Marchmont rushed past him into the gallery.

"Here I am, uncle," she remarked, as she wrestled with one of her gloves, "the luggage is all packed."

Bess was well under way again ventilating her grievances. She poured into the sympathetic ears of Miss Marchmont her woes regarding the servants and a hundred other matters.

"My job ain't marquissing," she averred, "but just wait till 'Dolphus comes back—that's all." She bit her lip and stamped the floor.

Miss Marchmont suggested that when her husband did return he should find forbearance and contentment in his loving wife.

"Why, what more can I do?" asked Bess, striking an attitude of hereditary martyrdom. "Now you're going I shall be alone," she complained. "Just you think of it, being alone in this great place for years and years, with only

Ma and Dolly in a 'ouse as big as the 'Ippodrome and a park bigger than Crystal Palace. Think of it—me—me, alone in a rose garden as big as 'Yde Park, miles from anywhere, when you and all the pals I have is off to the Music Hall Sports at the Oval."

"Beg pardon, my lady"—it was Dorman at the door again—"but the cabman says, how is he to catch the train?"

"Good heavens, is the man a fool," she answered him. "Tell the idiot to put salt on its tail," she replied cynically. "Catch the train! *I* never came across such a collection of idiots."

"He's right, though," observed Mr. Sims, consulting his watch. "We've barely got time. Good-bye, Bess, wishing you every luck. You've given us a great time."

"Good-bye," sang Miss Marchmont in a higher key as she laid her powdered face alongside Bess's.

"Good-bye," answered Bess, "wish I was coming with you. Give my love to London."

"Come along," shouted Mr. Sims, as his niece followed him into the hall. Bess passed into the morning room, where she found Mrs. Bissett seated with a number of tradesmen's books on the table in front of her, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Clayson, Dorman the butler, and several of the servants lined up each with the same look of dissatisfaction writ large on their countenances.

"Very well, Mrs. Clayson, here's her ladyship," observed Mrs. Bissett as Bess entered. "She'll settle it. Only let me tell you I've lived at Deerminster before to-day, and don't you forget it," she snapped out.

Mrs. Clayson folded her arms and drew a breath.

"I only wish we could forget it," she answered. "That's the trouble.'

"Why—what trouble?" asked Bess, getting on to a scent.

"This trouble," answered Mrs. Bissett, bringing the books down on to the table with a bang. "The butcher, the baker . . . ."

"Soldier, sailor, gen'leman, 'pothecary . . . ." broke in Bess.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bissett, "and all of them ending with 'thief.'"

"My lady," gasped Mrs. Clayson, but the mother of the marchioness was in no mood to be contradicted, and allowed her tongue its fullest scope.

"Yes," she said, "I know as well as you do. Why there's waste and picking enough to keep a whole regiment."

"But, my lady," protested Mrs. Clayson turning deferentially to Bess, "there's been no change . . . ."

"Not since I retired," remarked Mrs. Bissett significantly, "and I knew what went on then."

It was Dorman's turn to fly to the rescue of the combined forces.

"So do we, Mrs. Bissett," he added venomously, but we ain't been able to retire and buy a house. *We're* working still."

"Some people are never satisfied," was Mrs. Bissett's comment on the remark. "Able to buy rows of houses out of your 'savings'—and so you ought to be. But," she added, lowering her voice, "now it's all going to stop."

"Certainly, my lady," broke in Mrs. Clayson, still ignoring Mrs. Bissett's presence, "but we are not. And I speak for all of us," she explained, as she metaphorically scooped in the whole of the domestics with a sweep of her plenteous arm. "We're accustomed to work for the gentry," she proceeded, warming up nicely to her task, "and we won't put up no longer with being preyed upon and spied upon and ordered about the place by *some*"—she half looked in the direction of Mrs. Bissett—"who, so to speak, are no better than ourselves."

"Yes," capped Mrs. Bissett, equally combative, "and knows your habits. Ah, set a thief," but she stopped. "I should say—experience teaches, Mrs. Clayson."

"Then we'll obtain ours somewhere else," was the housekeeper's answer. "If you please, my lady, you will take our notices from to-day—all of us."

Bess arched her eyebrows in surprise.

"And speaking for the men, my lady," drawled Dorman, advancing a step forward with the full dignity of his office, "we'd rather go at once."

Bess made up her mind, and the hot temper which was always rising near the surface suddenly burst through.

"Yes," she almost shouted, "you shall go this very minute. Pack your things and get out at once, every blessed one of you. I'm sick and tired of you all. Go on—out of the house at once, and remember this, that if you want characters, you won't get none from me—no, nor from his Lordship neither—I'll see to that and . . . ."

"Why the dickens doesn't somebody answer the bell?" came a voice from the back of the morning room, as the servants stood back and Lord Adolphus carrying a travelling rug walked in and greeted his spouse.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here—you've come just at the right . . ." But Bess's words were interrupted by the repeated demand to know why the door had remained unanswered and her husband had been compelled to walk round the house before finding a means of entry.

"Because of this," explained Bess emphatically. "Just because your back is turned they come in an insolent deputation to give me their cheek and call my Ma names. . . ."

"Very rude of them," was the husband's cheerful comment.

"An' they've all given notice, and want to go to-day." Then, noticing that he seemed to be in no mood to become excited, "You don't seem surprised," she remarked, in a tone midway between sorrow and indignation.

"No; I'm not," said Lord Adolphus, with no uncertainty of speech.

"Indeed?" said Bess, "then p'raps *you'd* better talk to them yourself. I've done with them for good."

"Quite so," said his lordship. Then, addressing the others, "Mrs. Clayson, Dorman, and all of you—I'm sorry to learn that there has been trouble. What I've got to say to you I'll say later: I think it will somewhat surprise you. But for the present get back to your work. And, Dorman, you will find two gentlemen at the door whom I have brought with me. Shew them into the library." Then with a subdued and unanimous chorus of "yes, my lord," "certainly, my lord," an obedient throng walked quietly out of the room to resume their respective duties.

"If that's all you can say when we've been insulted, you might just as well 'av stopped away," complained Bess as soon as the room had been emptied again.

"No doubt," replied Dolly, refusing to be drawn into the vortex of controversy, "but I wanted to come home."

There was a pause, then,

"You might have sent a wire to say when you was coming," she added.

"Well—I couldn't tell for certain," he answered. "I travelled from Switzerland with—er—the Gores. Sir Anthony felt the journey a good deal and had to stay at Dover: so I stayed also, and accompanied him up to town this morning."

Bess expressed a hope that his sojourn abroad had been enjoyable, to which a ready assent was given. "I've found out all that I wanted: and now, dear little girl," he said more in the manner of a command than of a request, "run upstairs and pack."

She looked at him in amazement, and then at her mother.

"Yes, and you, too, Emily," he added, as they repeated the order in wonderment. "We're going up to London."

"But what for?" asked Bess indignantly.

"I'll tell you later," he remarked.

"Then I'm going to stay here," said the little woman defiantly.

"No, you won't," corrected the other determinedly. "Now, don't waste time talking. Order me a chop and a glass of sherry—and pack. I'll tell you all about it in the train." Then to the further surprise of the women he gave way to a chuckle of delight. "Ha, ha," he laughed, "this is going to be the happiest day of my life." And with that he walked away.

"'Appiest?" asked Mrs. Bissett, with worried

countenance. "Good 'eavens.' As 'e gone light-'eaded, or what?"

"No; light-'earted," mocked Bess. "Quite the little gentleman, you observe—sees me insulted to my face by his own servants and then sits down and larfs at it. Oh, I see exactly 'ow it is now," she went on. "I see 'ow it's all going to end. Well, it serves me right—I ain't Bess Bissett no more—I'm a fraud." She pushed up a bunch of obstreporous hair with the back of her chubby little hand. "I tricked him into marrying me, and now I'm getting paid back in my own coin. Here I am nothing at all: in the Halls I could top the bill. Yes: Lady Margaret was right," she sobbed, "my place here is the kitchen, the place I never ought to have left. Deerminster's no place for me, and I wish I was out of it—out of it—out of it." She buried her face in her hands across the table and allowed her petulant little temper to have full rein.

But Mrs. Bissett, for her part, was troubled with no regrets. "I know my place," she affirmed, "and I mean to be respected. Larf indeed? I'll go and talk to Adolphus as a mother should. He may laugh at whom he likes, but he shan't laugh at me." And with that she wobbled haughtily out of the room. Bess continued in her emotion for a few minutes, and then drying her eyes, rearranged her hair in the glass, and limped sorrowfully down the spacious hall to look for her husband. As she did so she was surprised

to encounter the figure of Lady Margaret entering slowly from a side door.

"Lady Deerminster," exclaimed the elder woman, as she held out her hand with a smile on her face. "I have driven over from the Duke's to you. I wanted to find you alone. . . . I saw from the Avenue there were people at the door, so I—forgive me—knowing the old place so well, I came through the garden." She paused for a moment to ascertain the manner in which she was about to be received. Then, "You will tell me if I intrude?" she asked deferentially.

But the pleasant taste of being supreme was still in Bess's mouth, and the opportunity of humiliating her most formidable foe was far too tempting to be yielded. Folding her arms, and tapping the parquet floor with her foot, she answered coldly, "It all depends on what you've got to say."

"Simply this," explained Lady Margaret, as they sat down in a cosy corner formed by an angle of the wall with the wide staircase. "My son Nigel wired from Switzerland as follows: 'Returning at once'" she read from a crumpled telegram, "'Merrowdale found. Sylvia Thorne died October 8th, 1885.' That was two years after I married, and so," she proceeded, "leaves my son nameless and penniless. For myself, I have no care for the wealth and place you took from us, but until I received this wire there was indeed hope. Nigel is all that is left to me in the world, and for his sake"—her voice trembled as

she spoke—"I come to beg. You said if I asked you. . . ."

As she spoke Bess realised the bitterness of the agony which a woman of Lady Margaret's nature was suffering to come cloaked with humility to herself. Not her face, but her voice betrayed the pain which it gave her to stifle her own feelings and come as a suppliant to the girl who had been but a few years ago a domestic. Even the self-abnegation was humility dignified. And no sooner had Lady Margaret begged to be regarded simply as one woman asking a favour from another, a mother pleading earnestly on behalf of her son, than the large heart of the very human if vulgar little Cockney was melted into a stream of womanly kindness. Her visitor had arrived at a critical moment, when Bess had begun to see the limitations of vanities and the obligations which high position and an ancient name are expected to fulfil. She was frank enough to recognise that she had been a failure, not so much through want of will as through deficiency of temperament and breeding. In her own plain philosophy she raised the natural to the highest possible pinnacle. To go contrary to nature was the worst kind of foolishness, and only by bitter experience had she found that for herself to exercise the office of a marchioness and to preside over the Chase were contrary to her nature. It was merely a favourable opportunity that was wanting to enable her to give the fullest recognition to this realisation.

The sudden return and resolution of Dolly, followed by the womanliness of a lady in distress, had settled finally the future mode of Bess's life. She knew what sorrow meant, and consequently she possessed a power of sympathy not inequal thereto. She was honest with herself, and one ounce of grit was to her worth more than all the titles and tiaras in the world. Lady Margaret had begged her not to ruin Nigel's future career. Therefore, she replied with perfect sincerity,

"Ruin it? No," she answered, "I'd die first. Don't say no more—not a word, Lady Margaret—I can't bear it. You shall 'av what you like," she said, not without emotion, "where you like, when you like—for 'im, for yourself. You've only to name it. I've been a heartless little beast: I know how spiteful I've shewn myself. Well, it's got back on me—I'm miserable now, I own up to it. The only thing I want in the world is to 'ear you say 'as you forgive: there isn't anything else I want besides that now."

"Yet there is something more," answered Lady Margaret, "there is something I never thought to say. I am a proud woman," she continued, "I come of a proud race: but you have taught me that pride can stoop to unworthy things, as I did when I spoke to you that day in Rumpelmayer's. You rebuke me more than nobly. I did wrong—I ask your pardon."

"No, no," protested the other, feeling her pang of shame the deeper still, "it ain't right—it

ain't fitting for that to come from you to me. Don't say that," she went on. Then she stopped. "If only," she resumed, as she held out her arms, "if only you would kiss me."

Lady Margaret did not wait for the girl's request to be repeated a second time. Pride and humility met together in the kiss of peace, and mingled their tears in mutual forgiveness and regrets. "My dear," began the elder woman, but the words stuck in her throat as she embraced the girl. At least Dolly's wife was a woman, and only one woman can feel for another how deeply a woman feels. And on the common basis of their sex Lady Margaret and Bess, different in every other characteristic—in temperament, in mentality, in education and ideas—discovered their bond of human sympathy, of hope and of mutual respect. It was on to this scene, strange and damp with happy tears, that Lord Adolphus, hurrying down the hall, came.

"Margaret," he exclaimed, in surprise at the lioness sitting down with the lamb on the same settee. He wondered what extraordinary plots were being hatched for his or others' benefits.

"Yes," answered the real Bess readily, as if to stifle his doubt, "*my* Lady Margaret. And you hook it off to London as quick as you please, for she's going to stay with me as long as she will."

"I suspected that," he observed, "and so I think did she."

"Indeed," corrected Lady Margaret decisively, "I did not."

"What," asked the man, "not after Nigel's message?"

"I could not tell what was in this kind heart," she said tenderly, as she patted the hand of Bess who was making a hurried calculation as to the lowest price Lady Margaret could possibly have paid for her charming costume. "To me the message meant the end of hope," she remarked sadly. "What else could it mean?" she asked, as Lord Adolphus regarded her curiously. He took the telegram from her hand.

"Margaret," he said, "what would it mean if that were a mistake: if that five ought to be a three? What would you say if Sylvia Thorne died in '83?"

"But she did not," replied the other.

"Then let me tell you," answered Dolly, "that she did—two years before your marriage."

Bess gave an exclamation of joy, whilst Lady Margaret opened her eyes wide and sat bolt upright.

"Heaven bless that post-office clerk," said Dolly, "a thing one doesn't generally remark about mistakes. Still, if it had done nothing else it has healed wounds and brought you two together." And then he told them the whole story, how Merrowdale had been found after much trouble, how the date and the diamond had both been discovered, and how the lawyers and

certain people in high places were seeing to the rest. As he spoke Dorman passed down the hall, followed by a representative deputation of the other servants of the Chase.

"Ah, there you are, Dorman," said Lord Adolphus, "yes—yes, come along Mrs. Clayson," as the rotund and stately housekeeper hove into sight. "I sent for you all," he continued, as they straggled down the hall. "Now, Dorman," he began, "what is it that you want?"

The butler made a step forward folding his hands, and with an inclination of the head,

"Speaking for the men, my lord," he said, "we are sorry to disoblige, but we can't stay."

"Well, of course it's a free country," replied Dolly, as he surveyed the throng with hats and coats and travelling bags fully prepared to make their instant departure. "If you think you are well-advised in taking this step, of course. . . ."

But his sentence was interrupted by Mrs. Bissett bursting in through the crowd and spreading a look of hostility to be shared especially by Dorman and the housekeeper. "Now before they go," she announced, "I should like to see what's in them bags."

A titter of indignation was scarcely suppressed before she was called to order by her son-in-law.

"Hold your tongue," he snapped at the woman, almost losing his temper. Then addressing the servants, "Now all of you," he said, "I told you I had something to say, and so I have."

Whereupon Mrs. Clayson stepped forward with full seriousness and remarked anxiously,

"Speaking for the girls, my lord, I hope you'll remember our characters."

"Good heavens," said Lord Adolphus, "what on earth do you expect I'm about to tell you?" There was a smile even on Dorman's lips at the sally. "Now listen, please," he went on, "you told her ladyship you were going. Let me tell you that you are not."

Mrs. Bissett gave a snarl and rose in wrath. "Then I *am* going," she declared. "If you don't know your duty to your wife," she raved, "I'll teach it to you, Adolphus. We don't stay in the same house with not one of them forty thieves and thievesses," she snapped, flinging her arms exactly in the direction of Mrs. Clayson. "No more would you," she said, "if you had any sense and had looked through the tradesmen's books as I have. Just look at the infidels," she shouted. "If they stay, I tell you, we go.

But Dolly was more amused than angry.

"Quite right, Emily," he agreed, "*they* will stay and *we* shall go."

Lady Margaret said something which only Bess and Dolly heard.

"Yes, Margaret," insisted the latter, "yes, yes. This place is no longer our place since—well, I'm no longer the Marquis of Deerminster. You understand, all of you," he said, turning to the servants, "the title has gone back to its rightful

owner, whose marriage is taking place in London to-morrow. Your duty is to your new lord and his lady as soon as they come back. But till they come, your mistress is Lady Margaret."

Dorman and Mrs. Clayson with a look of wonder and amazement interpreted adequately the feelings of the other servants as Mrs. Bissett quietly creaked her way upstairs to her room. "Come, Bess," continued Dolly, as he helped her to rise, "good-bye to Deerminster, good-bye to you all."

Dorman whispered to Mrs. Clayson and begged to be allowed to thank his lordship in the name of all the servants, and to offer their humble congratulations to Lady Margaret.

"I am glad enough to be back in our old home," answered the other with a trace of nervousness. "But we have not returned to our own again without remembering what indeed *are* our own—those who have served us so faithfully and loyally for so many years, and I am glad to know that they will continue to be here when my son comes home again to say to him and to his young bride —"A Villiers is ever welcome at Deerminster."

CHAPTER XVII

THE sensation which had been caused not merely in England but throughout the world by the disappearance of the great Cullinan Diamond, and the tragedy on Tower Wharf resulting in the death of Sir Anthony Gore's son and the subsequent discovery that the youth had been engaged with a notorious character in stealing from the Crown jewels, had lasted just as long as the almighty power of the press had been able to keep it alive. The story had not been told at first in its completeness. Something seemed to be kept back, and there was an air of mystery about the event as if some person or persons were being shielded. This, then, came as a fan to the flames of curiosity and the whole truth was only slowly, bit by bit, unravelled, until the newspaper public possessed all the facts (and a little more) connected with the incident which led directly to young Gore's death and indirectly to Callender's.

Quite early in the history of the investigations the resignation of Sir Anthony had been announced,

but even if this had not been made voluntarily it would most certainly have been demanded owing, among other reasons, to the popular clamour that forthwith arose. It was only after a Committee of Investigation had been appointed and all the facts and circumstances had been inquired into, and a report made public, that Sir Anthony was absolved of any blame. What had at first seemed likely to develop into a scandal of the first class, in which Sir Anthony was adjudged by popular decree to be his son's accessory, was quickly seen to be exactly the reverse. The pathetic picture of the old soldier, who had in earlier days done so much for his country and Empire, now broken in health and reputation owing to the wickedness and weakness of a wasteful son acting under the spell of a clever criminal was vivid in the imagination of everyone. The blame had been shifted from the shoulders of Sir Anthony to the system which allowed of a loophole in the protection of the national jewels. Instead of blame, pity and sympathy had been held out to the fine old General, and so entirely had the minds of the country been moved that a fund had been opened by one of the leading papers and a gigantic testimonial had been subscribed in spite of protest from Sir Anthony—who far rather preferred oblivion—in order to shew the public sympathy and their implicit confidence in the integrity of the man to whom the country owed already so much for his ability as a soldier.

Sir Anthony had very properly handed over the handsome amount subscribed to a charity for befriending old soldiers who had fallen on bad times, but he had received the clearest manifestation of the fact that his own honour had been vindicated, and this was to be made even still clearer by the personal intervention of the Sovereign; for by one of those happy coincidences which in the times of our tribulation have been known to occur just at the right moment, a favourable opportunity had presented itself. The successor who had been appointed to the Tower in Sir Anthony's place had, after a few short months, succumbed to a paralytic stroke, and when a suitable officer was again being sought, the choice of the King had settled the matter once and for all. Sir Anthony had been offered the appointment a second time, and the tactful and royal selection had been confirmed by a further wave of feeling expressed by the country.

And so it had come to pass that before another summer had ended, Sir Anthony and Dorothy were installed in the home that had been theirs for so long. Scarcely a year had gone by since that terrible evening, which not even the cruellest being now dared so much as to hint at. Public interest had been aroused still further by the sentimental setting which the Tower was to be given, for the daughter of the old General and the sister of the poor, deluded youth was to be joined in wedlock with the new Marquis of Deer-

minster, who, after months of delay in proving his right to the title, had like the Gores come out of the contest victorious. There is nothing that the world loves more than to see love triumphant over obstacles, and an almost personal interest was taken in the forthcoming marriage which was to prove the happiest and most fitting of endings to two separate and distinct stories. For weeks the papers had been filled with the preparations for the picturesque wedding which was to take place under the shadow of the grim walls of the Tower of London. Photographs of the future bride and bridegroom were in almost every journal. Picture postcards depicted them and sold as readily as if they were of a royal family. The bride's trousseau had been sketched, and printed in the papers, and scarcely a woman in England had failed to discuss the coming event with as much interest as if it had been the marriage of her only sister.

And so at length the day had dawned and the clouds which had hung about during the previous day had disappeared. The sun burst out and the clear sky of a June day had come back again. The precincts of the Tower were thronged with guests and press men, photographers and even cinematograph operators. From the east and the west, from the northern and southern suburbs eager crowds flocked to the historic spot to catch at least a glimpse of the bride whose name was in everyone's mouth. The third quarter after two

had sounded from the neighbouring clocks as the crowds on Tower Green stood on the tiptoe of expectancy. From the entrance to St. Peter's Chapel right down to the door of Sir Anthony Gore's house a broad strip of crimson carpet cleft the crowds in two, with a double line of Welsh Guards drawn up on either side, smart and bright in their red uniforms, and the spectators pressing close behind them, while the venerable Yeomen of the Guard, picturesque in their quaint dress and with well-polished, glistening halberds kept guard close up by the chapel.

At the sign of a movement in the vicinity of the door of St. Peter's, every eye was turned and every neck craned. Captain Carlyon in full uniform came out and said something to one of the yeomen, but at that moment a slight disturbance was taking place in the crowd behind. As he turned round he discovered two figures hot and breathless endeavouring to push their way through the guard.

"Hallo, Dolly," greeted Carlyon. Then turning to the little woman, looking quite pretty in a beautiful confection of Saxe-Blue, "How d'ye do, Lady Adolphus," he said, as a way was left for them to take up a position by the wall of the old chapel. "I *say*," he added, "you are late."

"Not too late?" panted Bess, as the crowd smiled. "Don't tell me it's all over."

"Awfully sorry," replied Carlyon, as he folded

his white-gloved hands behind him. "They're just signing the Register now. If you care to wait here they'll be out in a few moments."

"There, now!" exclaimed Bess, turning to her husband, "you see what comes of living in the country, I told you we should be late."

"My dear," responded the devoted spouse, "if you'd only come up last night as I suggested. . . ." But Bess was not to be gainsaid.

"How could I?" she asked, in an injured tone, when my dress hadn't come home?"

Before Lord Adolphus had time to think of a suitable reply, voices proclaimed that the exodus from the chapel had already begun.

"Here they come," said someone, as Sir Anthony with Lady Margaret on his arm walked slowly down the crimson carpet. As soon as his grave face was recognised a mighty cheer of welcome rose from the crowd. They stopped for a moment to shake hands with Dolly and his wife, and passed on.

A slight interval, and Nigel and Dorothy appeared at the door of the church. At the command, the Yeomen of the Guard raised the halberds and the Guardsmen drew their bayonets and crossed them to form an arch for the pair to walk beneath, as the strains of the organ swelled out from St. Peter's. As they proceeded, smiling and bowing along the carpet, over the site of the scaffold, past the Beauchamp Tower, the sun burst forth anew, lit up the fair, gold hair of the

new Marchioness of Deerminster and flashed erratically on the gilt buttons of her husband's tunic. Cheer upon cheer rose, and some scattered flowers for the young bride to walk on.

Bess and Dolly ran round to the entrance to the house across the Tower Green and met them as they entered.

She thrust her arm enthusiastically over the graceful shoulders of the bride, as Lord Adolphus heaped congratulations on Nigel.

"Dorry," said Bess, "God bless you, my dear —and may you be very, very happy."

"Thank you, dear Bess," replied the beautiful bride, as she kissed her on both cheeks.

"Ah, you're something like a Marchioness, isn't she, Dolly?" said Bess in sincere admiration.

"Uncle Dolly," began Nigel, as he took his relative's hand and received the congratulations, "Uncle Dolly, I can't say much, but *you* know. . . . I've got the wish of my heart," he said, as his eyes filled.

Dorothy heard. "Dear old Tower," she remarked, as she halted at the door of the house and turned round to look across the Green. "Do you remember, Nigel?" she asked, "what I said that night? It's all come true, you see."

"Yes, yes," said Nigel, as they proceeded into the house, "just like a 'fairy story.'"

"With the joyful ending and the happy omen," put in Dolly. "It's an old saw, but it's a good one—'happy is the bride on which the sun shines.'"

He gave his arm to Bess and followed into the Governor's house.

FINIS

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